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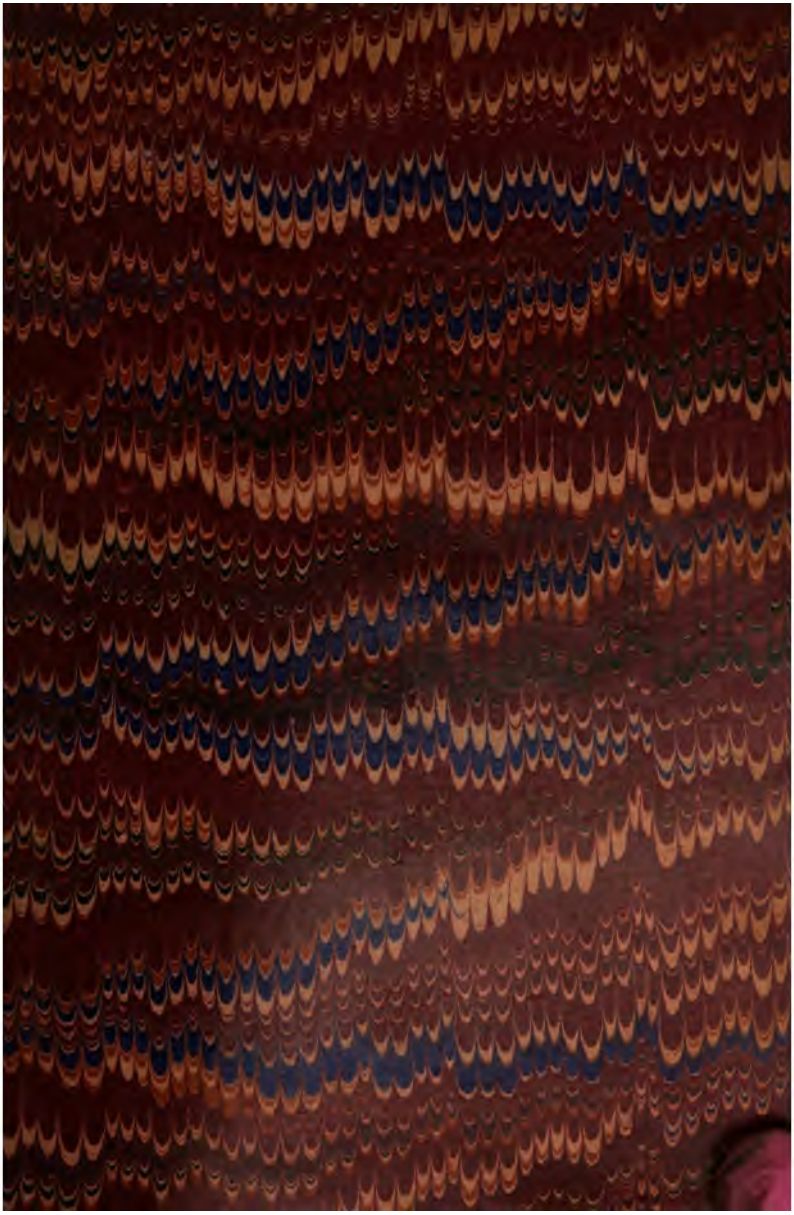

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VILLAGE COMEDY

BY

MORTIMER AND FRANCES COLLINS

AUTHORS OF "BLACKSMITH AND SCHOLAR," "SWEET AND TWENTY,' "FRANCES," ETC.

A NEW EDITION

London

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THE VILLAGE COMEDY.

CHAPTER I.

THE COPSE HILL INN.

Comedy meaneth sweet play in a village.—*British Birds.*

VALENTINE. . . . . Landlords differ, friend.
There be some put salt i' the tankard.
ORSON. . . . . Ay, a plague to them.
They themselves drink not, so they spoil good liquor.
Old Play.

"LET us go up this hill," said Frank Forncett to his companion, "and we shall get a good view of the country round."

Frank Forncett and his young friend, Harry Rivers, were making an autumn tramp through Oakshire, and had taken the train from London to a Thames-side town, whence they had begun their walk.

"What a splendid view!" said Harry, as they reached the top of the knoll.

"I wish we'd brought a glass," said Frank; "we might make out some of the country."

They were standing near a clump of trees, under which some beneficent person had placed a large bench. An old man was sitting on the bench, evidently resting from the load he had been carrying. As the gentlemen approached he got up, lifted his hat most courteously, and said:

"Gentlemen, I hope I am not in your way."

Although his clothes looked ragged and old, he had no roughness in his manner, but showed a natural gentleness; and his blue eyes were so bright, and long white hair so

picturesque, that Harry Rivers, who was an impetuous youth, became enthusiastic about him, and wanted to find some way of offering him money, as he thought by the appearance of his clothes he must need it. He said:

"Pray don't move. You must need rest if you have carried such a load as that up the hill. Have you far to go?"

"Not much farther, sir. But, you see, I ain't as young as I was."

"I daresay you are a good age," said Frank Forncett.

"I'm in my eighty-five," said the old man.

"Then, perhaps, you are the oldest inhabitant," said Frank; "there are generally two or three 'oldest inhabitants' about a village."

"Well, sir, now that old Webb is gone, I suppose I am about the oldest. I am older than the church and the inn and the shop, and most of the houses in the village. But that church you see over there, sir, with the tall spire, is a sight older than me, for they say it's six hundred years."

"What is the name of this village?" said Frank.

"Copse Hill, sir."

"And may I ask your name?" said Harry modestly, feeling that age should be respected.

"Leonard Day, sir; but I'm generally called old Leonard in these parts."

"May I have the pleasure of making you a present?" said Harry, pushing five shillings into the old man's hand.

"God bless you, sir," said Old Leonard in astonishment; "you must be a most extraordinary good young gentleman."

"If you are going to act in that way to all the picturesque ragged old men you meet in villages on your way," said Frank, "you'll have to write to your father before we come to the end of our tramp, and ask him for another cheque."

"But, look here," said Harry, as they made their way down the hill through yellow furze and purple heather, "what a pretty village! Really, it is the prettiest I ever saw in my life. Just look at that inn in the broad sunlight, and the burly landlord at the door. What a picture! and what a jolly little nest of a house there is enclosed by all those trees. And look at the village shop across the green there. What is it painted on the board? BAKER, GROCER, DRAPER, READY-MADE CLOTHES AND HATS! I suppose that is the only shop. What a primitive place to be only thirty miles from London. How I should like to dream away my life here! I should like to live in that nest and work in the garden, and nail up

the roses and honeysuckles on the walls, and never leave this peaceful spot! How I envy you, old fellow; you could do all that if you like; you are not obliged to work as I am; I hear of nothing but my career—as if I cared for a career! Why can't my father let me have enough to come and live in a cottage and be quiet?"

"My dear boy, you talk nonsense; you don't know the world yet. In calculating life you leave no room for the passions of men, either good or evil."

"But there can be no evil in such a place as this: surely everything must go smoothly here. There are no rival shopkeepers to hate one another, and the people who live in the cottages round must be good when they have such beautiful country always before their eyes. I can understand that in squalid streets, in close towns, there must be everything that is bad; but in such a lovely spot as this people cannot help being good."

"Well, let us go in and taste the village ale, and I'll bet you a cigar, Frank, that in a very few minutes I'll show you that there is as much evil speaking, lying, and slandering here as anywhere; and I'll bet another cigar that the shopkeeper and innkeeper have a quarrel."

They entered the village inn, the Pleiades.

"A fine morning, gentlemen," said Biggins, the landlord, a man of the Daniel Lambert build. There was a kind of surliness in his civility.

"Yes," said Frank Forncett, "it is a fine morning. We want to taste your ale, landlord, and perhaps you can give us a bit of bread and cheese."

"Come in, sir," said Biggins.

"Now then, some bread and cheese and ale," said Biggins to his wife, a pleasant-looking woman, who seemed rather above her position.

"Will you walk into the parlour," she said, "and it shall be brought to you."

"No, thank you," said Frank, whose idea was gossip, "it will do here."

The "bar" of the Pleiades was a small room with a bow window, which enabled you to see what was going on either up or down the road, and there was an aggressive clock over the fireplace.

Mrs. Biggins busied herself to supply the travellers' wants, and old Biggins, whose body seemed too heavy for his legs, flopped down on the window-seat, and eyed them drowsily.

Harry Rivers was somewhat disappointed with what he supposed was an ideal landlord. His burly form at the doorway, seen from the hill, looked picturesque; but nearer inspection showed that his fibre was coarse and his frame heavy.

"This is a very pretty village, landlord; it is called Copse Hill, is it not?"

"Yes," said Biggins, with a grunt.

"Do you know the population of the place?" said Frank.

Biggins scarcely understood the meaning of this.

"How many people?" explained Frank.

"Well, sir," he answered slowly, "I don't know that I've ever counted, but there's a main few comes here for beer. It's a dead-and-alive sort of place, and wouldn't do me much good but for the farming and carrying."

"Oh! then you are a farmer and carrier," said Frank. "By the way, you've a famous man somewhere in these parts, I believe."

"A famous man! I haven't heard of him," said Biggins. "Have you?" he said, addressing his wife, as she came in with the bread and cheese.

"No," she said. "I don't know of anyone about here particularly famous. There's Sir Herbert West and Squire Ashley, and Mr. Perivale and Captain Lovelace."

"No, I mean Mr. Manly Frowde; doesn't he live in these parts?"

"Oh, yes," said the landlady; "but he's nobody; he lives just over there in a little house behind those trees; but he's nobody at all: he keeps no carriage, and has only an odd man about the place. We don't take him as much account, sir."

"So much for honour in one's own village, Harry," said Frank.

"Have you a post-office here?" said Frank to Mrs. Biggins. He had noticed that the village shop was a post-office, and wanted to hear what was the landlord's opinion of the shopkeeper.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Biggins; "it is over at the shop there."

"They seem to sell everything there," said Frank. "Who keeps the shop?"

"Miss Tattleton," said the landlady.

"And a nice character she is," said Biggins, who suddenly sat upright, as if he had found something sufficiently worth sitting upright for. "Why, I wouldn't post a letter there

for anything. Not I, I'd rather have my old mare out and trot off to Wenley to post my letter. It was all along of that there fellow who lives in there," pointing to Manly Frowde's place, "that she got that post-office. We used to have a pillar-box, and quite enough too, but that there fellow in there must have a post-office; a pillar-box ain't good enough for him. And so he writes to some of these here people up in London, and he gets just what he likes. Why, if a poor fellow gets a drop too much and makes a bit of a noise outside here, he writes to some of these here people, and down come the police on us. They say now he's going to have a telegraft down here, but I shan't send no telegrafts through that busybody, Miss Tattleton, and I don't know who else will."

Biggins seemed inclined to go on, but was out of breath with such a long speech. His remarks were generally laconic, unless some one whom he considered his enemy was mentioned. At this time Miss Tattleton and Mr. Manly Frowde happened to be his chief enemies.

"I say, Harry," said Frank, quietly, "two cigars."

Harry's face had certainly lost a trifle of its sunshine.

"Cigars, sir, did you say?" put in Mrs. Biggins.

"No, thank you, we've plenty with us."

Harry quietly pulled out his case and offered it to Frank, who took two cigars with a quiet air of amusement.

As they walked away Mrs. Biggins stationed herself at the bar window to see which way they went.

"Going over to the old cat, I suppose," grunted Biggins. "Don't think much of them gents."

"The eldest one was no gentleman, I should say," observed Mrs. Biggins, "for he wears almost as shabby a coat as that Frowde."

"Perhaps they've come after the silver spoons," said Biggins.

"There they go into the shop," said Mrs. Biggins,

"A nice lot of lies she'll tell 'em," said the landlord.

CHAPTER II.

THE COPSE HILL SHOP.

O gossip, thou delicious thing!
  Thou tirest not, like love or liquor:
When there's a story with a sting
  How shrill tongues move, how green eyes flicker.

"WELL, Harry, what do you think of your ideal village landlord?" said Forncett.

"He certainly does not seem to be living in charity with his neighbours, but then he may be an exception. Perhaps we shall find the shopkeeper more amiably disposed. Good morning," he said to a middle-aged, brisk-looking woman who opened the shop door as the two gentlemen approached.

The door was divided in two, and humble customers squeezed through half as best they might, but when Miss Tattleton saw anyone of consequence coming, she generally unbolted the other half, and gave a courteous greeting. Though not always might the greeting be courteous: it would partly depend on the day of the week. Miss Tattleton was occasionally visited by commercial gentlemen, who prowl from place to place with long faces and long bills, and whose faces elongate if they do not happen to receive precisely the sum of money they expect, since they know that their employers will visit on them the sins of their customers.

Miss Tattleton gave long credit to villagers, which was perhaps worse for them than for herself, as when once they had run up a heavy score they found it almost impossible to pay it quite off. Still, as she would observe, the poor things must not starve, and no doubt she saved many a family from going on the parish in the time of their distress. Then when there were weeks of frost in winter, or wet weather in summer, half the parish would be taking credit from the village shop, hoping for better days soon.

Miss Tattleton's travellers did not share her sympathy with the poor, but only wanted their money, and she, in disgust, nicknamed them "fiends." Therefore, should you go to her shop when she has had a visit from a fiend, you will not find her in a good temper. Her dormant cynicism will be developed. She will not have a good word for anyone, and will describe all her neighbours in unpolished epigrams.

Miss Tattleton to-day is radiant. It is a good harvest, her poor customers are bringing in money, and there is plenty for any fiend that may turn up. Besides, she sees a couple of strangers, and anything new is her delight. Dressed in a bright cotton dress, and pleased with herself and all the world, she looks twenty years younger than she probably is.

"Good morning, sir," she said, in answer to Harry's greeting. "Will you take seats, gentlemen?"

"No, thank you," said Harry, who at once sat on the counter, and began surveying the contents of the shop.

It was a small room with a counter on each side, where were draperies and groceries of all sorts; cheese, butter, lard, eggs, sweets, corduroys, smockfrocks, gaiters, crockery, tinware; and from the ceiling hung brooms and brushes, boots and shoes, candles, gridirons, teapots, saucepans, and many other things.

"What a curious mixture," said Harry. "You can get everything you want, from a rasher of bacon for breakfast to a candle to light you to bed."

"Yes, sir, and some paper and envelopes to write to your sweetheart," said Miss Tattleton. "But don't you want something of this sort?" and she handed him a pair of baby's socks. She always has a touch of impertinence, sometimes pleasant, and sometimes spiteful.

"I am rather too old to wear them," said Harry, "and too young to want them for somebody else."

"There would be no harm in having a pair ready," said Frank, who entered into the fun of the thing. "Your time must come."

"It doesn't come to everyone," said Miss Tattleton, "or I should be a grandmother by now; but what can I serve you with?"

"I have come for some postage stamps, and to know whether you have any bad people in these parts," said Frank.

"Postage stamps are plentiful, but bad people are scarce. We are a very well behaved village: the parson works so hard that they think of making him a bishop, the schoolmaster talks Latin, the innkeeper sells good beer, and never uses bad language, and as for myself I try to prevent gossip. There's somebody across the way who writes books and never puts any of us into them, though there is great temptation, as we are a queer lot." Miss Tattleton thought herself great at irony.

"What a jolly place this must be to live in," said Rivers. "Is there a cottage to let?" he said jokingly, "with just room to swing a cat in."

"We don't allow swinging cats in this village. You would not swing that beauty, would you?" pointing to a magnificent mouser, with long fur, too lazy to open her eyes.

"If I tried, her mistress might scratch, if she didn't. But how about a cottage?" said Rivers.

"I have heard that the gentleman who lives across the lane there is going away. He wants to marry a few daughters, and young men are scarce about here."

"Now, Forncett, wouldn't that place suit you? You might take the house and one of the daughters as well, and I could come and stay with you."

"Is that house really to be let?" said Frank Forncett, seriously.

"Well, sir, I had it from the coachman, as had it from the lady's-maid, that the family thinks of going to live near London to bring the youngest young lady out. They haven't put up a notice to let, but I've heard they have employed an agent, and I know people have been coming to see it, so there would be no harm in inquiring."

"And so your neighbour opposite writes books?" said Frank; "but I suppose none of you read them,"

"I don't read his rubbish," said Miss Tattleton; "but I'm told he puts me in his books and says I keep a scandal-shop. I gave him a bit of my mind one day, and told him he was ruining my business by saying that. At our 'Penny Readings' he reads a lot of foolish verses about the people here, and fancies he is going to keep us all in order, though I do think he has improved the language of the landlord over the way, who used to swear awful till Mr. Frowde made fun about it at a penny reading."

"But I thought you were all such good people, and that there was no swearing or slandering or anything wrong. In such a lovely peaceful little place as this you ought to live like a happy family," said enthusiastic Harry.

"You had better come and show us the way, sir," answered Miss Tattleton.

"And who lives in that house?" said Frank Forncett, pointing to a good-sized red-brick house lying opposite to the left, behind a couple of acres of meadow.

"Oh, that is Mrs. Selfe's. She is a very queer old lady. She has two pretty daughters, but she treats them so badly

they won't live with her. So there she is in that big house all by herself. She has got a different religion from us, but she comes to church sometimes, and always sits down at the parts about Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. She never spends any money in the neighbourhood, or does anything for anybody; so the sooner she goes the better. Her daughters come to visit Mrs. Manly Frowde, and the old lady don't like to have her own flesh and blood so near her; so they say she's going, and that will be another house to let, which perhaps might suit you, sir," said Miss Tattleton, turning to Harry Rivers.

"But I shouldn't know what to do with such a big house all to myself," said Harry.

"Oh! you could easily find some one to share it with you. There are a great many young ladies in these parts wanting husbands. Why, Mr. Urgent, the Vicar of Battlefield, has eight grown-up daughters, and only one is married. She has just married her father's curate; you might choose any one of the other seven."

"Perhaps you'll choose for me," replied Harry.

"They're all such beauties that if I was a gentleman I should not know which to choose," said Miss Tattleton.

"And who is your clergyman here?" said Frank Forncett.

"Mr. Bonfellow, sir, and a downright good fellow he is. People do complain of him sometimes, but they are never satisfied. They say he takes too many holidays, and then the old men and women have to die without him, which they don't think right; and they say he gives to people who want, whatever they are, whether they are chapel people, or drunkards, or anything else bad; and he will even help a woman in distress who has got a baby without first getting a husband, and there are plenty of that sort about here."

"Shocking," said Frank Forncett; "you wouldn't help such a creature, would you?"

"Of course not," said Miss Tattleton, with mock gravity. Though Miss Tattleton has been known to nurse a man in delirium tremens, when his wife and all his friends were frightened to go near him; and she never flinches when she is asked to go and sit up with a fever or small-pox patient. She does not deny help to the worst of characters, and would assist her greatest enemy if he were in distress. To the woman with a baby and without a husband she would no doubt give a severe scolding—and some clothes for the baby.

"Do you know if Mr. Bonfellow is related to Sir Richard Bonfellow?" said Frank.

"Yes, sir; he is his youngest son."

"Ah! I know the old gentleman," said Frank, turning to Harry, "and a grand old boy he is!"

"Well, madam," said Frank, who treated all women respectfully, "I will take my postage stamps and depart. Perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again some day."

"I hope so, sir," she replied, and she bowed them out.

"What nice fellows!" she said to her niece, Susan, who had been upstairs putting on her afternoon gown, but had been down for the last five minutes watching them through the little parlour window that looked into the shop.

"What a swell the young one looked! The old one looks more like Mr. Frowde's sort, in his shabby old coat," said Susan.

"Yes, but do you know," said her aunt, "that I believe the old one means to go and look at old Wemys's house, and I shouldn't be surprised if he took it; for he said he might have the pleasure of seeing me again, and he seems to know old Dick's father."

Old Dick was Miss Tattleton's way of speaking of the Rev. Richard Bonfellow. She had such nicknames for most of her neighbours.

"I shouldn't have thought he was much, from his clothes, aunt."

"I didn't at first, but I could soon see he was a real gentleman," said Miss Tattleton, who fancied she was clever at discerning true gentlefolk, though if she had been questioned she would hardly have been able to say what her standard of gentility was. Most people of her class, and also a much higher class, fix it at a carriage and pair of horses. The pair is necessary—one horse would not do. A pony-chaise or a gig may mean respectability, but a true gentleman or lady must have a pair of horses. Now Miss Tattleton was somewhat of a Radical in this matter: she would pay deference to anyone who arrived at her shop in a carriage-and-pair, but she would express her free opinion of them all the same. "Mean wretches!" she exclaimed of one family, as they went from her shop; they try to beat everybody down, and get everything as cheap as they can, and begrudge their servants a bit of extra tea and sugar, and all to keep a pair of horses in front of them. I don't call them real gentlefolks."

A customer came into the shop. She was a flighty-looking young person from the village inn. Miss Tattleton knew that this young woman never came into her shop except as an excuse for asking questions, so she fancied—and rightly—that the two strangers who had just left were the objects of curiosity.

"I want an 'air-net and a yard of elastic," said the young person, simpering. "What lovely weather, Miss Tattleton. I have just been for a little walk, and I met two gentlemen going into Wemys's house. I suppose they are friends of Mr. Wemys. They had lunch at our house."

The truth was that Mrs. Biggins had told her daughter to walk up the road and watch where the two gentlemen went when they left Miss Tattleton's.

Miss Tattleton was shrewd enough to guess this, and knew that the young woman wanted to know all about them.

"No, they're no friends of his. They've been sent down here by the Government to enquire about the water. So they came to me first to know what I had to say, and now they have gone to Mr. Wemys."

"But mamma said they were quite strangers, and knew nothing about anyone in the place, and hardly knew the name of the place."

"Of course not," said Miss Tattleton, "because they've never been here before; but I daresay they'll come again, and you'd better tell your mother's man to look out, for they'll be down upon him."

The young woman tossed her head proudly, and quickly retreated, making up her mind not to visit Miss Tattleton again in a hurry. Which resolution she would no doubt keep till curiosity should overcome pride.

"I've settled her for a time," said Miss Tattleton, as she wiped her spectacles, preparatory to settling down to her accounts.

The fact was that Biggins, who would at any time cut off his nose to spite his face, had, at some trouble to himself, diverted the course of a brook which from time immemorial had supplied water to various houses in the village. It was Miss Tattleton's sole water-supply; and after passing through her garden, it ran into Mr. Wemys's grounds, and formed a dip for the use of his gardener. Miss Tattleton offended Biggins by pointing out to the sanitary inspector some nuisance on his premises: he, in revenge, caused holes to be dug in the chalk to let the rivulet off, so that no water

passed beyond his own farm, and many families were inconvenienced. Mr. Wemys, who was especially annoyed, took action in the matter, but through the unsatisfactory state of the law obtained no redress. Biggins lost about fifty pounds over the litigation, and would probably in time have been brought to his senses, but Mr. Wemys, having decided to leave the neighbourhood, took no more trouble about it.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE TO LET.

Love you the man, with fine loquacious vein,
Who pours small beer of talk as if 'twere dry champagne?

"She's an odd character," said Frank Forncett, as he and Harry Rivers walked across the green from the village shop. At this moment a tall man passed through the gate of Mr. Manly Frowde's house, and lounged up the road reading a book. He wore an old velvet coat and a white waistcoat, and a battered straw hat with a red ribbon round it. The book he was reading seemed centuries old, with its yellow pages, and oak cover, and antique clasps. The little green opposite the village shop forms a triangle, and as Frank and Harry reached a corner of it they came close to the stranger. He had just closed his book, and seemed to be repeating something from it to himself, quite unconscious that anyone was near him.

"This is Manly Frowde, I am sure," said Frank. "Let us pay reverence to genius." Whereupon the two gentlemen saluted him. Manly Frowde, suddenly seeing the salute, awkwardly touched the battered brim of his weather-beaten straw hat.

"Are you seriously going to inquire about the house?" said Harry, as Frank showed signs of walking up to Mr. Wemys's gate.

"Yes, I am; I like the look of the place. It looks quaint and original, and there is some character to study here. If the house is neither too big nor too small, I have an impulse to take it."

"You want to turn hermit, do you, after seeing everything? Be on your guard. Hermits have been tempted in the loneliest deserts."

"It will be a new sensation to be tempted in a rustic corner like this. We have seen no daughters of Circe either at the village inn or the village shop, have we?"

"Faith, I should think not," laughed Rivers.

Mr. Wemys was a portly gentleman, who received them with an air of pomposity. He was one of those who put on a grand dignified manner to hide some defect. Such men are afraid to speak in a friendly way to people of a lower class in case their position should be mistaken. If a labourer ventured to remark to Mr. Wemys that it was a fine day, he would reply as if he patronized both the man and the weather.

"Ah," thought Frank Forncett, "I can see this man is a downright good fellow at heart, and I know what little defect he would hide by his manner. But he might be easy with me. Perhaps I can make him so before I have done with him."

After they had seen the house, which was a tolerably good one, with four or five acres of land attached to it, and had received all necessary information, Frank asked a few questions about the neighbourhood.

"Are you far from a station?" said Frank.

"Three and a half miles from the nearest, but that is a small one called Two Bridges, and we find Medenhithe, which is five miles away, the most convenient," said Mr. Wemys.

"Ah," exclaimed Frank, "we have just walked from there."

"Walked?" said Mr. Wemys in astonishment. "You must be very tired and hungry? Pray let me offer you something."

"Thank you, you are very kind; but a dozen miles is scarcely anything to me, and we got some bread and cheese at the inn. We intend making a tramp through the country, and took the train from town to Medenhithe this morning. We were so much struck with the view from the knoll, and the pretty appearance of the village, that we halted, and going to the village shop for postage-stamps and gossip, we heard that you wished to let your house. I have for some time been looking for a house that should be quite in the country, and yet not too far from London, and not near a railway; and I think this will exactly suit me. I should therefore like to take

it at once to prevent anyone else from having it; and if you will be kind enough to take my address, for I have not a card with me, we can afterwards settle all other matters."

Mr. Wemys was delighted to get the house off his hands so easily, for he had a long lease, and paid a fancy rent, and found it difficult to induce anyone to take it. When the matter was quite settled, the hospitable Mr. Wemys said:

"May I not persuade you to discontinue your perambulations for to-day, and to stay and dine with us? We dine at six."

"Thank you, I think we'd better tramp on."

"No, no; let me find your young friend and talk to him, and then I am sure you will stay."

The "young friend" had, while looking over the stables, made acquaintance with young Wemys, a lively boy of twenty, who was waiting for his commission, and had to wait some time, as his name appeared a very long way down the list at the examination. For all that, he was cut out for a soldier—had a manly look, plenty of energy, a sound constitution, and just the proper amount of pugnacity. His algebra might be shaky, but his nerves were not; and if he was dubious about the legs of that confounded isosceles triangle in the Pons Asinorum, he could use his own on a long tramp. He will probably make as good a figure as men much higher up the list. They were looking at some valuable little dogs that young Wemys was rearing, when Frank and Mr. Wemys joined them.

Harry Rivers was quite willing to stay to dine. "But we've no clothes with us," he said, "except some trifles in our knapsacks. Our clean linen is ordered to be left in readiness for us at certain inns where we have arranged to stop, and we hope not to put on a dress-coat for a month."

"Oh, never mind that," said young Wemys. "Look here, father," he said, turning to him, "you and I will dine as we are to keep these gentlemen company, and Ma and the girls will have to forgive us."

Mr. Wemys liked the dignity of the family kept up by everyone appearing dressed for dinner, and young Wemys, who was always a gentleman in any coat, used often to appear in morning dress. The old gentleman would put on his most dignified manner and inquire the reason, but his son would say, "Late this evening, sir—watch slow—very sorry—shan't occur again."

So it was arranged that they should stay to dine.

"I think, Mr. Wemys, we will sleep at the inn to-night, and start on our walk soon after daybreak to-morrow. Will you let your servant engage some bed-rooms for us?"

"I can hardly recommend you to go to the Pleiades, for Biggins, the landlord, is a most turbulent fellow and a great promoter of discord in the parish. Will you allow me to accommodate you?"

"Certainly not. You are very good, but I could not trouble you so far. I should like to go on very early in the morning, and would not take the liberty of disturbing your household. Is there another inn within reasonable distance?"

"There is one a few yards from my gate, which our friends have sometimes used when the house is full. If they can accommodate you, I think you might be comfortable," said Mr. Wemys.

"Thank you," said Frank; "that will suit us. You have no lack of inns."

"Unfortunately, we have thirteen public-houses in the district for a population of 850. So you may well understand that we are not free from drunkenness in these parts, though the peasantry generally are exceedingly well behaved on the whole—very well behaved"—said Mr. Wemys, relapsing into his patronising tone when he thought of "the lower orders." "The shopkeeper is, I think, a little given to gossip and mischief-making, but an excellent woman in her position—rather a rough tongue sometimes, and requires to be kept in her place—apt to forget when she is speaking to her superiors," he said loftily; "it is that man Biggins who demoralizes the villagers. He encourages poachers and low characters, and anyone who has lost his place from dishonesty. I don't like to see a gentleman's servant hanging about at the Pleiades. I know he is doing no good there."

"Your parson is Mr. Bonfellow, I hear," said Frank. "I know something of his family."

"Estimable young man," said Mr. Wemys, "though sometimes a little lax in Church matters. A little more ritual would please me."

"And you have Mr. Manly Frowde here?" said Frank.

"Yes," said Mr. Wemys; "do you know him?"

"Only his works," said Frank.

"I have a speaking acquaintance with him, but we don't visit," said Wemys, in a tone which clearly meant that Manly Frowde was somewhat beneath his notice. "He's a clever writer," he continued patronisingly.

"Are you much troubled with morning callers and dinner invitations?" asked Forncett.

"No," said Wemys, who wished he had been more troubled in this way. "I do not find my neighbours very sociable; in fact, the dulness of the place makes me leave it. I do not care for society myself, but my young daughters must go out a little."

"The dulness will exactly suit me," said Frank. Frank Forncett could easily see why Mr. Wemys was not likely to be much visited.

There is no need to describe the dinner, which was well served and gaily eaten. Mrs. Wemys was a pleasant hostess, and the three young ladies agreeable enough, though they did not wound Harry Rivers's susceptible heart. He thought little Kitty lively and pretty, but then she was only a child. They took leave early, and smoked a cigar with Wemys the younger, as he guided them to the Red House, a quiet, well-conducted inn, where they slept right soundly.

They were off again next morning at a very early hour, meaning that night to sleep at the town where King Alfred was born, and to climb the White Horse Hill the day after; a good pull, with plenty of hill and dale, but they did not tire, being sound of wind and limb, and loving a long tramp in the open air. With the exception of some chops at East Ilsley (where mutton ought to be good considering its great sheep-fairs), they took nothing save the casual glass of ale till they reached the Bear, at Wantage.

"What a glorious day we have had!" said Harry Rivers, throwing himself into a chair, evidently built for the biggest farmer in the county. "What's to be had, waiter?"

"Steak and stout," said the functionary promptly.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed the exuberant Harry; "no oysters, of course? We're twenty thousand miles from anywhere. I say, Frank, has it occured to you that you'll get nothing fit to eat at Copse Hill? The old boy's mutton-cutlets yesterday were mere fibre."

"I shall get everything from London," said Forncett; "Ralph does all that for me. I take no trouble."

"He's an invaluable fellow."

"Ay, he is. He's a clear brain and an active body, and the stillest tongue I ever knew."

Forncett went to bed that night well satisfied with what he had done so promptly. Always had he been given to neglecting the saying that "second thoughts are best;" but for that

propensity he might not at this moment have been a bachelor. He slept soundly after his long tramp; no vision of the night came to tell him that he had taken a step which would change the whole current of his life: no such presentiment reached him. The two pedestrians breakfasted together in the gayest humour, and tramped off early at five miles an hour in search of the Blowing Stone and the White Horse of Alfred.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW COMER.

Always a flutter of petticoats, always a whirlwind of chat,
When a newcomer arrives in a village marvellous slow:
Tradesman hopes he has means, and may turn out a thundering flat;
Damsel hopes he has means, and may be a possible beau.—
Cynicus de Re Rustica.

Mr. Wemys wished to leave The Birches as soon as possible, having heard of a house near town that would just suit him, while Frank Forncett was anxious to get into his new house. Therefore, about the middle of November several large vans arrived at The Birches, and the goods were moved in under the superintendence of Ralph.

This was quite a sensation for the village, a nine days' wonder, at least.

"Who is the new comer?" was every-one's question. Mrs. Biggins oracularly remarked in the bar of the Pleiades that "whoever he was, he was no gentleman, as you might see by his dress."

"Any horses and carriages?" asked a gentleman's coachman.

"He won't have no horses and carriages," said Biggins, in a sneering tone; "he is something the same sort as that there fellow over there." (This was Biggins's usual way of mentioning Manly Frowde.) "He's a seedy chap, he is, and not worth much, I guess."

Biggins was a carrier as well as a publican and farmer, and kept large furniture vans, to which he gave names. One was the "Garibaldi," the name being painted in large yellow letters on a red ground on the side of the van. Biggins had

an idea somewhere in his stolid old head that Garibaldi was a great man, though if you had asked him what he knew about him, he would have been puzzled to say.

"What's old Garry doing now?" he would often say to anyone who he thought read the papers and knew what was going on in the world.

But he has lately found another hero in the Tichborne claimant, and relates with pride how he has been considered by some people to be like "that unhappy nobleman in Dartmoor." If he should set up a new furniture van he will no doubt name it after his new hero. He seems to have a misty notion that when "old Garry" comes over here, everything will be made right, and "Roger" will get his own again. Now, if Ralph had employed Biggins to bring the furniture and had not objected to paying what Biggins would call "handsome and like a real gentleman," Frank Forncett would have been heralded by a flourish of trumpets from the frequenters of the Pleiades at least.

"They say there's not much to be expected from the new gentleman," said one of the good wives of the village, at Miss Tattleton's, as she was carefully laying out her small weekly allowance, on a Saturday afternoon, in provisions for the following week.

"Who told you so?" said Miss Tattleton, rather sharply, weighing out a quarter of a pound of tea, which was supposed to be sufficient to serve a family of six for a week.

"My husband says as how he heard Mrs. Biggins say so."

"And what does she know about it?" said Miss Tattleton. "You wait till you see," she said, with a significant nod, and she pushed the tea tightly down in the paper as she packed it to make room for an extra handful, which she put in before tying it up, and handed it with a look as much as to say, "I speak sharp, but I give you an ounce of tea to make up."

This was her usual way of treating poor customers, and may perhaps account for the fact that she has not yet made her fortune.

Among the many inquiries at Miss Tattleton's about the new comer, was Mrs. Lovelace, who liked a bit of gossip dearly. She had been a very handsome woman, and was trying to grow old gracefully, as Madame de Staël puts it, but did not succeed. She came mincing into the shop, dressed in a style that would have been delightful in a girl of eighteen, but which scarcely suited her maturity.

"Well, Miss Tattleton," she said, "I hear that somebody

has taken Mr. Wemys's house. I hope he is some one on whom county families can call; so many doubtful characters come into this neighbourhood, and Captain Lovelace, as you know, is very particular."

"Yes, ma'am, we know the Captain is quite right to be particular. I think the gentleman who is coming to The Birches is very pleasant, but not quite the sort that you and the Captain would like. He is, I think, more like my neighbour opposite," said Miss Tattleton, pointing to Mr. Manly Frowde's house.

"Oh! do you think he is only an author?" said Mrs. Lovelace, looking very much disappointed. "That would be a great loss to county society; we don't want any more of those troublesome authors about. We have been hoping we should get a nice family here."

"I wouldn't say he was an author," said Miss Tattleton; "though I have heard that there are large chestfuls of books come down with the luggage."

"I can't think why these authors dress so badly," said Mrs. Lovelace, "unless it is that they are so very poor. What a guy that poor Mrs. Manly Frowde makes of herself. I really quite pity the poor creature, though I don't suppose she knows how bad she looks."

"At any rate, she always looks happy, and I am sure you and the Captain set a good example in dressing," said Miss Tattleton, looking admiringly at Mrs. Lovelace's rich dress; "and we can't all be good-looking," she said archly.

Mrs. Lovelace tossed her head coquettishly, delighted with the compliment, and forgetting that the pretty little coquettish movements, which are so sweet in a girl, are contemptible in an elderly woman. She was one of those weak women who are completely conquered by a little flattery.

It is a brave sight to see an old man or woman bearing the weight of age cheerfully. Old age is too often made ugly. Young people, instead of reverencing their elders, laugh at them, or are frightened of them; and how common it is to hear young people say that they hope they may never grow old! But when, as sometimes happens, the experience of age is combined with the freshness of youth, it is a glorious sight, enough to make one wish to grow old.

Unfortunately, some people try to keep the freshness of youth by painting and adorning the body instead of adorning the mind, and such can only be melancholy objects. The

true way to render age vigorous is to prolong the youth of the mind.

By the end of November The Birches was in perfect order, ready for its new master. The indefatigable Ralph had engaged a couple of maid servants and a groom, who were all paid very high wages, on the understanding that they would be dismissed at a moment's notice, and forfeit a month's wages, if they were known to gossip of their master's affairs. It had been impossible to get any information from Ralph, but it was quite expected that the other servants would talk. When it was found that they were silent, the verdict in the village was that the new gentleman was somebody mysterious, Biggins suggestingthat he had no doubt done something he was ashamed of, or he wouldn't keep his affairs so dark.

"And I don't think much of that precious man of his," said Biggins, "a ordering everybody about as if his master was a lord, and never giving a civil word to anybody. If he and his master thinks they're going to keep their affairs to themselves they're a precious lot mistaken, for the old cat over there 'll soon find out all about 'em, and if she don't, I will, blessed if I don't;" and he brought down his hand with a mighty thump on the table. Biggins's oaths—and he used one on almost every occasion—need not be repeated. They were rather monotonous, consisting chiefly of a sanguinary adjective and a condemnatory allusion to the eyes.

It is calculated that a first-class English orator will use about ten thousand words, and an English peasant three hundred. Compulsory education being unheard of at Copse Hill, the vocabulary of the labourers is represented by about three hundred words. So the oaths are necessarily not much varied, and Biggins's fine monotony is closely imitated by his admirers, who are numerous. The boy of ten, who hears the huge landlord's sonorous execration, passes it on an hour or two later to his comrade of eight. Miss Tattleton's admirably ironical laudation of the village showed very much what it was not. This is the sort of thing you find in the country where the parson is powerless for good, where the education is inferior, where country gentlemen neglect their duty to their dependents.

Before Frank Forncett comes to the village which is athirst for the mysterious stranger, the hero of this story must appear, else the reader may take the new tenant of The Birches for the hero, which he is not by any means. He may

play Mercutio to the hero's Romeo, or Horatio to his Hamlet who knows? One thing is certain, that had not Frank Forncett taken with such fatality of promptitude Wemys's house, he would never have had revealed to him the great mistake of his earlier life—would never have come face to face with his boyish self, and wondered what a fool he had been. We never know what trivial incident may change for us the aspect of the world.

CHAPTER V.

THE HERO AT HOME.

I want a hero—an uncommon want.—BYRON.

THE parish of Ashton Minima, in the county of Oakshire, had, at the census of 1871, twelve inhabitants. At the census of 1861, it possessed thirteen inhabitants. The wife of the keeper of the turnpike-gate died somewhere between those two dates, and nothing had occurred to increase the population. The parish is a sinecure rectory, without a church; and the only houses beside that at the toll-bar are the rectory, which contained seven inhabitants, and a small public-house, the Waggon and Horses, which contained four. Yet is it a large parish as to acreage; but landowners and farmers live beyond its boundaries, for it is almost all heath and moorland, good for the partridge, and not altogether bad for the sheep.

The Reverend Marston Sebright, sinecure Rector of Ashton Minima, was a man doubly, perhaps trebly, disappointed. His father was that famous Bishop Sebright who invented a new reading of the damnatory clauses of the Creed erroneously ascribed to Athanasius. Marston Sebright, his only son, who took high honours at the university, and might have risen to the highest rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, had unhappily a constitutional affliction which incapacitated him—he had a chronic asthma, which compelled him to speak in a whisper. Such being the case, he could never hope to wear lawn sleeves in the House of Lords, a position which episcopal fatherhood

and remarkable talent might well have attained for him. A sinecure rectory suited him well: he married, had one son, and devoted himself to editing classical authors. He felt within him the power to teach Christianity to the people with no common influence, but physical inability rendered that power useless.

His second disappointment was in his wife, one of the most charming creatures in the world, who made him thoroughly comfortable, and who distinctly declined to be discontented, or to sympathize with his discontent. Marston Sebright was intensely ambitious, and saw all the higher levels of ambition placed beyond his reach! His wife had no ambition, and wanted him to be happy with her in their strangely solitary home. He could not; he felt like a caged eagle. He longed to find utterance for his ideas in the oratoric form. He would wander over the moorland for hours trying to articulate aloud, and his voice would be merely a whisper.

Marston Sebright's third disappointment was his son—our hero. Jack Sebright (nobody had ever been known to call him John) was simply the happiest young fellow on this earth's surface. He had never had a headache or a toothache; he possessed a strength of the Hercules type; at the same time, without being a genius, or even a clever fellow, he managed to graduate in honours at Cambridge, after being captain of the boats at Eton. He got among the wranglers, not by real mathematical science, but by the physical strength, which enabled him to cram anything. It was memory, the physical faculty, that set him above many men of greater intellectual power than himself. If we look at our statesmen, we find that brain can only come to the front when there is backbone to help it. The power which made Jack Sebright seventh wrangler made him the fastest round-hand bowler of his time. He dismissed mathematics from his memory when he left college. He did not dismiss cricket.

Now the Reverend Marston Sebright wanted this boy, the great Bishop Sebright's grandson, endowed with physical powers which he, unhappily, had missed, to enter the Church and keep up the hereditary ecclesiastical renown. The youngster did not seem to see it. His kind mother, a quiet creature, whose sole desire was to make father and son happy, did what she could to persuade him. That rebellious backbone of his militated against it; he'd have liked to be a soldier or a sailor rather—perhaps even a tinker or a tailor. He had doubts—real honest conscientious doubts—of his fit-

ness to undertake a cure of souls. Many people do undertake it with far less fitness than Jack Sebright.

His father sent him abroad to have a look at the world when he found him in this impracticable mood. Marston Sebright had great faith in the influence of time and change. He remembered how fiercely he had rebelled against his own great disappointment, and now he was content, though perhaps not quite happy, when the great critical journals told him he was the best classical scholar in England. That had not been his ambition—he had longed to be a great preacher. Vain to murmur: each soldier of God must take his allotted place in the great army.

Jack Sebright obeyed his father's behest, and zig-zagged through Europe. Travel suited that untirable backbone of his. He was quite ready to scale the Andes, or row round the world in a canoe. His hidden power wanted development, and he had not yet decided in what way it should be exercised. His father thought he would make a capital parson, but this is a world in which people are extremely inclined to differ from their fathers—and to be very savage when their sons differ from them.

After wandering in many directions, he came to Venice. It was evening on the Piazza di S. Marco. The mighty tower which maddened the author of *The Stones of Venice* threw its long shapely shadow across the noble square. Jack Sebright heard an English voice asking some casual question. He saw in the moonlight a tall broad-shouldered fellow, who was manifestly English. With the natural freemasonry of Englishmen he addressed him, and in a few minutes they were sitting together on chairs in the moonlight, while an active waiter brought refreshment, and they watched some girls dancing in the distance.

"A magic scene this," said Manly Frowde, for it was he whom Sebright had accosted. "My wife and I must be off to-morrow, for there is work awaiting me in England. You take your time, I suppose?"

"I came to-day, and want to see this wonderful city."

"You are right. Here is Antonio Quadri's guide-book, which I have done with. It was published in 1827, but is curiously faithful to the old churches and palaces—so little are they changed. But there's a magic of poetry about Venice: you might meet Shylock on the Rialto, and think of little locked-up Jessica, resolved to run away. Then there's Schiller's seer of ghosts, and Voltaire's dinner of the six de-

throned kings. And can't you imagine Byron and Shelley fluttering pieces of paper from their window for the innumerable pigeons to fly after? Poets are such fools, you see, and Shelley has been known to turn a five-pound note into a paper boat and float it away upon a pond."

"I should like to meet you when I get back to England," said Sebright, with no very definite connexion.

"Easy enough," replied the other; "I've a little place at Copse Hill in Oakshire, a few miles from Two Bridges, and my wife is always pleased to receive a visitor who isn't a prig."

"I hope I'm not that," said Sebright, laughing in a tone that startled the piazza. "I'm so glad to hear you live near my father's place. It's Ashton Minima; he's parson there, without a church; and he wants me to be parson too, and I don't half like it."

"A sinecure rectory," said Frowde. "You are about a dozen miles from me. Can you find your way over?"

"I've been there before. There's no mistaking the two clumps of trees at the top of the beautiful hill, or the stolid stout landlord at the bottom. I'll come over, if I may."

"Better come now and ask my wife," said Frowde. "She likes enthusiastic young fellows, and perhaps she can give you better advice than I can about entering the Church. My opinion is that the men who have conscientious scruples against taking orders are the very men who should do it and be of use. I have rather a weakness for a fellow with a conscience. The sort of parson I detest is the man who stands by his office, does innumerable silly things, and says they must be right, because he was divinely ordained."

Jack Sebright went right willingly to Frowde's hotel, and was introduced to Mrs. Frowde;—a lady made of flesh and blood, with a soft white style of dress in lace and frill that suited her Persephone form, with sunlit brown hair leaving with a perfect curve the broad forehead that indicates power and love. She saw through this young fellow at once, and liked him; and not long was it before, over a light Venetian supper, they were frankly discussing this boy's prospects.

"You see," he said ruefully, but with a glass of light wine ready to wash down his trouble, "my father says that because his father was a bishop, I ought to be. Now do you agree with that?"

"It may be logical," said Frowde, "but it does not seem to work. One of my grandfathers was a schoolmaster

and the other a soldier; and I am neither, but a poor scribbler."

"I wish I could write," said Sebright.

"Try," said Frowde. "It is not, except in accidental cases, a lucrative occupation, but I suppose it is the most gratifying to the human mind. I write for filthy lucre, though I would write willingly for fame, if in these days fame could be obtained by the eagle's flight—straight sunward. It cannot: and the only man who in these times can live by writing is the man who does not care what he writes, or the man who has money enough to pay for the issue of his work."

"I should like to break through the vile system," said Sebright, broadening his stalwart shoulders.

"Come and see us when you return," said Mrs. Frowde, smiling at his fine boyish enthusiasm. "We'll talk over parsons and publishers after dinner. We can give you a bed in a homely way."

"I'd sleep on the roof rather than not come," said Jack Sebright.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEROINE BY THE SEA.

ALOUETTE: I like the sea, Prince.
RAFAEL: Yes, the flying yacht, you know.
With topmost royals, making timber perilous,
And a gay wind to race with!
ALOUETTE: Ah, but plunge in it!
Down in the depths cool your hot eyes with emerald
Wave made for mermaids! Fathom the abysses where
Strange creatures dwell—a world unknown, unknowable—
Perhaps a race more great than men can ever be!

The Comedy of Dreams.

"MR., MRS., AND MISS TEMPLE." Thus ran the announcement in the *Visitor's Guide* to the pleasant South Devon village of Dawlish—beautiful still, though the inexorable Brunel spoilt it by running the railway right across the estuary of its delightful little river, which sparkles between green lawns to the sea. He could not spoil the crescent of

sand, the tall red cliffs, the silver-sounding midnight moaning sea. The stern old King of Ocean, whom Homer has named the Shaker of Earth, seems calmer along that sinuous sweep of Devon. He seldom rages into hurricane. He comes whispering musically up the shore, and kisses the dainty feet of pretty girls.

This is a very pretty girl who trips daintily along the sands right early in the autumn morning. She is going to the machines. She is in the most delicate costume for a bather; her amber hair is loose over her shoulders; her eyes are almost too demurely hidden by dark-lashed lids. She sees no one as she hurries across to her bathing-machine, dressed in a style that seems rather to suit Trouville or Deauville than quiet little Dawlish. Old Captain Radmore, who always turns out in the morning to look at vessels in the offing, but whose glass sometimes sweeps the sands when there are women about, has on this occasion his attention divided. He sees a mighty monster of the deep steaming down Channel, and says to himself,

"That's the *Thunderbolt*. She'll go down, with all on board, and then perhaps they'll hang the Lords of the Admiralty."

Yet he also sees this pretty coquette tripping down to the sea, and soliloquizes thus:

"By Jove! a new arrival. A tidy saucy little craft. Wonder who she is."

He watched her through his glass. Just before she reached the little row of bathing-machines, a tall gentleman passed her pretty close. Each gave a perceptible start, but no greeting occurred between them.

The Captain shut his telescope with a snap.

"Some romance there," he thought. "I should like to find it out."

O energetic fellow-creature, were it not better to create a romance of thy own than to espy and eavesdrop some other human being's romance? Romance is a good thing; would there were more of it in the world. It is the middle space between high poetry and dull prose. Few men can be poets, fewer women; but all men or women who are not governed by evil influences—by fashion or fanaticism, by vanity, the love of slander, and other meannesses of the lower intellect—can enter and enjoy the glorious demesnes of romance, so exquisitely described by Coleridge in his *Garden of Boccaccio*: —

I wander through the Eden of thy hand,
Praise the green arches, on the fountain clear
See fragment shadows of the crossing deer ;
And with that serviceable nymph I stoop
The crystal from its restless pool to scoop.
I see no longer ! I myself am there,
Sit on the ground-sward, and the banquet share.

That banquet is open to all who ask for the key of the garden. But who asks ? Most men pass contemptuously by, on their way to one of the many temples of Mammon.

Captain Radmore speculated, of course wide of the mark. The vagaries of a big ironclad, built to reach the bottom of the sea, were more in his way than those of a young lady with hair of the latest dye, and a costume for the seaside fresh from Paris. As to that young lady, she went on to her morning bath, looking neither to the right nor the left, and assuming a delightful unconsciousness.

Not so the gentleman she had met, and who had recognized her. A shudder passed through him. A tall calm quiet man, whose talk was brief but choice, who had seen many lands and many events, who held that difficulties were made to be overcome, and troubles made to be forgotten. An excellent creed : but why should a forgotten trouble turn up here at quiet red-sanded Dawlish, with a new colour in her hair but the same wicked look in her eyes ? He felt it hard upon him. He walked rapidly home to his lodgings, which were in a large house facing the sea, close to the red cliff which shuts out the pretty village from all things else save illimitable water.

Ascending to the first floor, he met a lady, tall and nobly developed, with much dark hair and very soft grey eyes, and kissed her lips.

" Where is the child ? " he asked.

" Gone for a bath. You don't look well, William. Take a glass of hock before you breakfast."

" Thanks, Leonora," he said. " Where is Kate gone to bathe ? Away to the left ? "

He took a field-glass, and looked along the line of ugly machines that defaced the full curve of the little bay.

" To the left, I think she goes ; but why do you ask ? "

" Well, I have just met Flora."

" Again ? "

" Yes, she seems to haunt us. I don't want to curtail my darling's liberty, but I dread what harm might be done if Flora met her."

"She has too much sense," said Leonora decisively. "She knows the truth both from you and me, and she is a girl of very clear intellect. I don't fear her, William; you need not."

"Kate is not easily shaken in her convictions," answered Mr. Temple; "but you must remember how curiously plausible and persuasive Flora is. Her way of following us is significant of some ridiculous purpose; we saw her in Paris, we saw her at Brighton, we saw her in such an out-of-the-way place as Clevedon. Now, I don't believe she can do any harm, but I hate annoyance; and I wish we could find a house inland that would suit us. Flora would not follow us into a quiet village. She must have her amusement. She is a mere butterfly, that has singed her wings. I am simply sorry for her; I do the best I can for her; but I am not able to bear these constant persecutions. We must go elsewhere. I wish we could find the sort of place we want."

"Oh, so do I!" said the lady. "Kate might find it dull; but, if you take her to town now and then, and give her a course of opera and theatre, you'll keep her brain alive. I am proud of Kate. She enjoys life wisely. She is very inquisitive and very speculative, and enthusiastic when she finds sure ground for enthusiasm."

"Your character is laconic. Pray explain, Leonora."

"Well, I'll put a special question. Suppose she met Flora? She would try to find out all about her. On what little she could gain from her conversation she would base her own opinion. Then she would, with that suppressed enthusiasm of hers, love or hate her intensely."

"And which do you think?"

"Hate."

"Horrible thought!" said Temple, pressing his hands to his forehead.

"Yes, dear William," said Leonora; "but would not love be far more horrible?"

At this moment the waiter entered with letters.

"Now, perhaps," said the lady, "we shall find your house-agent has heard of some place to suit us. Shall I look through the letters?"

"Do, darling," he said. "That meeting with Flora has disgusted me. You understand my feelings; no one else does."

She kissed him on the forehead as he lay back in his chair, saying,

"It would be strange indeed if I did not understand them. We have suffered alike; but we have our love left, an undying love."

"We have, indeed," he said. "And we have our dear Kate to bring forward quietly, and to save her, if we can, from the troubles we have endured."

She opened several letters, none of which seemed of much consequence. At last she came upon one from the house-agent, who informed them that he thought he had found exactly the thing they wanted—large rooms, ten acres of ground, three and a half miles from the station of Two Bridges, which is merely a small one with few trains in the day; situated in a small village, and some distance from the road; the neighbourhood very quiet.

"That sounds well," said Mr. Temple; "but we have looked at so many, and been disappointed. Where is it?"

"The house is called Winterslow, and is in the village of Copse Hill, in Oakshire."

"Well, we had better look at it, Leonora; for we must make some effort to avoid these disagreeable meetings. I wish it were further from a station; but it is conveniently near London. I know something of the neighbourhood, though I do not remember that I was ever in Copse Hill. I suppose it cannot be far from the Thames, and that would suit Kate and the dogs. Let us, at any rate, leave here to-day or to-morrow, and go to town; and then we can run down and look at the place."

"I shall be delighted," said Leonora, "to get to some quiet nook where I can forget my trouble; and I long to begin again my favourite occupation of gardening. But I am afraid it will be a dull life for poor Kate."

"Nonsense, Leonora; I'll take care that neither you nor Kate shall be dull."

"Was I ever dull with you, William?" she said, taking both his hands in hers.

"I hope not," he said, with a loving smile. "You are the bravest woman in the world, my Leonora."

At this moment in comes, or rather rushes, Kate Temple. She is sea-drenched. A gay girl of eighteen, not quite so tall as Leonora, she is far more excitable. She cries out—

"Oh, papa, mamma! I have had quite an adventure. When I came out of the machine a lady spoke to me. So lovely, with long yellow hair, eyes blue as sapphires, and

such a pretty pleasing soft way. I should not call her honest, I think," said the outspoken girl.

Mr. Temple shuddered. Those words, too true, were terrible to him from those lips.

"And what did she say?" asked Leonora.

"She talked as if she were mad," replied Kate Temple. "I think she must be mad, mamma. She said first, 'Are you Miss Temple?' and of course I said I was. Then she said that I should be sure to come to a bad end, for the Temples always did."

Mr. Temple laughed at his pretty daughter.

"Some half-crazed creature, Kate, depend on it. You won't be troubled with her again, for I think of going to London to-morrow, and I have just heard of a house in the country which may perhaps suit us. We have been wandering so long that a little quietude will be pleasant."

"It will indeed, papa," said Kate, always ready for a new movement.

So telegrams were sent to hotels, and luggage packed rapidly, for when Mr. Temple decided to move his servants had to move also. The quietest man in Europe, he always had his way in such matters. Pretty Kate was delighted at the move, but she came down rather out of form to catch the early train. She had dreamt a strange dream of the lady she saw on Dawlish sands: and there was in her mind a troubling thought—"Can it be? But no: it could not, for she looked so very young."

CHAPTER VII.

A SINGED BUTTERFLY.

Θεοὶ ῥεῖα ζώοντες.—Odyssey, v. 122.

THE gods of old Greece were neither moral nor immoral, but profoundly indifferent to ethical questions. This, doubtless, was the natural tendency of the Greek mind in its earlier state. The Heroic Age, as described by Homer, is one in which no idea of the Ten Commandments ever entered into the mind of man, still less into the mind of any divinity. The schoolboy—if there be such a phenomenon, who studies

his Lemprière or Smith intelligently, must be rather amazed at the sayings and doings of certain gods and heroes, goddesses and heroines. There is not an immaculate character in the whole mythology. Yet the work of Greece in the world was a work unparalleled, and its poetic creations were without the faintest rivalry till one William Shakespeare arose.

"The gods live at their ease," says Calypso, in the *Odyssey;* "and there are men, and indeed women, who, though not god-like in much else, have that touch of Greek divinity. Such a man is Arundel Lifton, who is just now lounging along the West Pier at Brighton. Straight as an arrow, dressed to perfection, with hair and moustache untouched by the hand of time, no one would guess him to be half-a-century old. He carefully forgets it himself. He is in the prime of life, and why should he count years? Born to a vast fortune in Cornish mines, educated at Eton and Christchurch, left by the early death of his father to do just as he pleased, he had lived a life of calculative voluptuousness. He believed in one god—and that god was himself. He resolved to have as much pleasure as possible, with as little pain. He never drank or smoked to excess; he never sat up immoderately late; he never gambled or betted; and—which amazed his acquaintances (he had no friends) more than anything—he never travelled by rail. He had tried it once, and it had bored him and fretted him, and next day he read of an awful railway accident: so he kept to the road thereafter. There was never the slightest need for him to be in a hurry; he was accustomed to send horses forward on any long journey. "You can stop where you like in your own carriage," he used to say; "in a train you are at the mercy of a sooty engine-driver. I have one principle throughout life—and that is, to be my own master."

He carried out this principle to the utmost. He married, in the bloom of her delicious youth, one of the sweetest girls in the world, and then deserted her in a way most shameful. He was quite ready to make her a large allowance: she, being a lady pure and simple, declined to accept a farthing from him, and lived on her own small fortune. Happily, they had no child. Then he took his own way. He liked adventure that was spiced by wickedness. He paid like a prince for his amusements. Hitherto, princely payment had, strange to say, taken him safely through his cool evil career; he had not met anyone with hot blood, or cudgel or rapier, to punish him as he deserved. He had a charmed luck, probably.

We first behold him on the West Pier. He has been a day or two at the Old Ship Hotel, which comfortable hostelry has long been used to his habits, and where certain quiet rooms are always reserved for him. Arundel Lifton likes not to be disburbed. He hates a scene above all things. He does not like the patrician pretentiousness of the Bedford, or the noisy splendour of the Grand. He is (and it is one of his few good points) as keen a judge of wine as any man in Europe. Wisely said the Arab sage, "To choose thy caravanserai, taste its forbidden liquor."

Arundel Lifton dined in his private room that night on mutton and game, with a bottle of choice Lafitte. He was an epicure on principle, and studied the composition of every meal he ate. To-night there is a ball at the Grand Hotel, and he thinks he will look in. Those hotel balls are rather an American idea, but they seem to go well in Brighton—where indeed most things do go well. So Mr. Lifton, an hour or so after dinner, dressed indolently. He never employed a valet. "Such a bore to tell the fellow what to do—less trouble to do it yourself:" thus said Mr. Lifton. He slowly got himself into evening dress by his bedroom fire, and then said to himself,

"By Jove! What an exertion! I think I may allow myself a glass of Chartreuse."

A brougham was waiting. He was at the Grand Hotel in two minutes. It was now about eleven. He entered without much expectation of amusement, but found a gay and vivid scene. The hall and corridors were steeped in light. Doubtless the company was mixed (for Brighton is the modern Corinth), but the dress-coats and the toilettes were superb, and what more can you want? Homer mentions a people who cared for very little except yachting, banqueting, music, dances, clean linen, baths, and beds. Whoso doubts this statement, let him read the eighth book of the *Odyssey*. Humanity changes little.

Arundel Lifton, the most distinguished man there, with an air of mystery about him, an air of haughtiness, leans against a column and looks round. The M.C. of the night proposes introduction to a partner, but he declines in so quietly lofty a way that the M.C. thinks him a royal personage incognito. As a fact, he is faultless. He has so graceful a figure that any tailor would gladly dress him for nothing. But Arundel Lifton laughs at tailors, invents his own coats, and pays ready money. He does not aim to set the fashion, like Brummel,

George IV., and Count D'Orsay: for he is a handsome man of sufficient inches and of stalwart chest, and to follow his method of dress the puny striplings of fashion would have to grow.

He looked on philosophically. Presently he caught a glimpse of a lady in a waltz. She had amber hair; she was dressed so that the light fabric showed the beauty of her shoulders, the soft curve of her breasts; she was deliciously piquant and pretty. She looked a girl—she had looked a girl a few weeks ago at Dawlish; but she was quite as capable of maintaining the appearance of youth as Arundel Lifton himself.

"Flora, by Jove!" he said to himself. "I caught her eye. What's the best thing? By Jove! I'll go and talk to her. We can't have a row in a ball-room."

So he took the bull by the horns, and walked up to her, somewhat to her surprise.

"You look charming to-night, Flora," he said.

"I feel miserable."

"There is no need. Come, let me take you to have some supper; the fowls will be all drumsticks if we don't make haste. These Brighton folk, and especially the American visitors, have an infinite affection for liver wings."

"I wish I could cry a little." she said, "and nobody saw me. Oh! how I wish I could pray! you have made me wicked, Arundel: you will have to bear some of my punishment."

"You silly child! Come along, and we'll get some lobster salad and Chablis. The beggars generally keep something for me in these places, because I always give them something."

"How much you think about money, Arundel!"

"Of course I do. It's the lucifer match of the fire of life. It has bought me many things. It bought *you*, you hussy."

It was hard for Flora to restrain tears at such insult, but the public were around her, and she kept calm.

"Arundel," she said, in a low whisper, "if you must speak to me like this, we had better not meet again. You have caused me unendurable misery, and now you treat me in this scandalous way. I could have forgiven you if you had been a gentleman, Arundel. Good night."

She flung away hotly, and left Mr. Lifton to his own reflections, which were quite untroubled.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. SELFE AT WINTERSLOW.

After her health we asked,
  Our care and regard to evince :
We have made the very same speeches
  To many an old cat since.
    HEINE (Mrs. Browning's translation).

IT was some two or three weeks after Mr. Forncett's first visit to Copse Hill with his friend, Harry Rivers, that Mr. Temple arrived with his daughter at Medenhithe station, whence they drove to Winterslow. Here they were most courteously received by Mrs. Selfe—a handsome, sweet-looking old lady, with a peculiar softness about her. She had a quantity of very white hair, a soft, pale complexion, and a sweet low voice; these, with her pretty dress of grey silk and white lace, made such a picture that Kate felt quite enthusiastic.

Mr. Temple found, after a little conversation, that Mrs. Selfe was inclined to change her mind, and did not wish to let her house—at least, for that winter. She was profuse in apologies for having given him so much trouble, but she had only made her decision on the previous day.

"This is a pretty neighbourhood," said Mr. Temple, "and I am sorry, for my own sake, that you have decided not to leave. Do you know if there is any other house to let?"

"The opposite neighbour is going away; but I understand that his house has just been taken by a bachelor. I forget the gentleman's name."

If the gentleman's name had been mentioned, it would no doubt have prevented the Temples from wishing to live at Copse Hill.

"Well, if you should again change your mind—and you know we allow ladies to do so as often as they like—you will perhaps be kind enough to let me know through your agents, and give me the first chance," said Mr. Temple, who had set his heart on the place, as it exactly suited him.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Selfe; "you may depend on me. And now let me offer you a little luncheon after your journey," she said, in the sweetest manner.

Mr. Temple looked at his daughter, and saw that it would please her, so accepted Mrs. Selfe's hospitality.

Mrs. Selfe was an intellectual woman, in one sense of the word. She liked "plain living and high thinking." Her "living" was plain enough; but whether her "thinking" had much height or depth is doubtful. However, she despised so gross and sensual a thing as feeding, and would have preferred to live in a world where it was not necessary. There was one weakness she acknowledged—she liked fruit; but she considered that taste was no more sensual than liking flowers for their sweet smell or pretty look.

It is rather difficult to draw a line in these matters. If one person has no taste for food, is he to condemn another who has? And if one person finds that it suits his constitution to be a teetotaller, is he to condemn another who finds that a glass of wine suits him?

Mrs. Selfe was a teetotaller, and almost a vegetarian, and she looked down with contempt on people who required more food than herself. Therefore the lunch offered to Mr. Temple and his daughter was somewhat frugal; indeed, Kate, with her healthy appetite, and after her five miles drive on a fresh October morning, with the west wind in her face, could have eaten everything on the table.

Mrs. Selfe was a democrat and Unitarian, and dabbled in a little science and freethinking; so the conversation at lunch took a scientific turn, and Kate wondered why such a sweet-looking old lady should care to use such long words and talk so learnedly. Then Garibaldi was mentioned, for his portrait hung on the wall; and it was discovered that Mrs. Selfe was an enthusiastic disciple of Garibaldi, though she did not seem to understand much about the freedom of Italy—but her son had been killed in fighting under Garibaldi.

"Oh, how sad!" exclaimed Kate; "and have you any more children?"

"Two others," she said, as if unwilling to answer.

"And are they girls, or boys?" said Kate, without noticing the old lady's confusion.

"I have two daughters," she said, rather stiffly.

"Kate, dear," said Mr. Temple, seeing there was something that annoyed Mrs. Selfe in this question, "won't you eat one of those beautiful apples? Does your orchard produce these?" he said, turning to Mrs. Selfe to prevent Kate from continuing her catechism.

"Yes," she answered; I have some very fine sorts, and a great many more than I can consume or want for my friends. I am obliged to sell some."

After lunch they went to see a vine in the greenhouse which Mrs. Selfe had grown from a cutting taken from Garibaldi's vine in Caprera, the bunches of which she distributed among her friends as something sacred.

They then took their leave, with a renewed promise that Mr. Temple should be informed if Mrs. Selfe should again change her mind.

"Oh, papa!" said Kate, when they were alone, "what a charming old lady! But, do you know, she reminds me of a beautiful big white cat; and when she talks in that soft voice it is just like a cat purring. When I first saw her I felt just as if I had seen a beautiful cat that I wanted to stroke. And I really think, papa, she is like a cat in another way, for I can fancy that if you stroked her the wrong way she would ruffle up her fur, and stick up her back, and dart fire from her eyes and hiss at you."

"I think, Kate, you were very nearly rubbing her back the wrong way when you were so inquisitive about her children."

"Oh, yes, papa! Did you notice how stiff she was? Oh! I did so long to know about her daughters. I am sure there is something mysterious."

As these daughters will appear in our history, we will for the present leave Kate and her father, and give some little history of Mrs. Selfe and her family, for which purpose we will commence a new chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

MATERNAL AFFECTION.

"In reality, though, she hated her own son: of which, however monstrous it appears, I am assured she is not a singular instance."—FIELDING.

THE motto of this chapter is taken from *Tom Jones*, and applies excellent well to Mrs. Selfe, inasmuch as she hated her own daughters—at least it is to be presumed so from her treatment of them. Having been left a widow with a comfortable fortune while the girls were young, she brought them up according to her own fancy, and exercised the greatest tyranny over them. Her son, who was some years older than

his sisters, disliking the restraint of home, so soon as he could realise the legacy left him by his father, went to Australia. Then his mother found out that she loved him, and would have given anything to bring him back; but it was too late. He came back, only to go away again after any wild adventure. He was eventually killed while fighting with Garibaldi, and was then canonised by his mother.

The daughters, Diana and Claudia, unfortunately could not run away, though they often longed to do so. They were jealously guarded from companions of their own age; with what object it is difficult to understand. But, as they grew up, they made friends with some of their mother's visitors, and enlisted their sympathies. Then Mrs. Selfe would leave her house and go into a new neighbourhood. She had tried three different neighbourhoods in this way, when she finally settled at Copse Hill, thinking, no doubt, that in such a dull place Diana and Claudia would have little chance of making acquaintances. One indulgence she allowed them—namely, riding. This they owed to their father, who had always wished that they should be good riders, and had taught them himself. When they came to Copse Hill they were informed that they could no longer have the use of the horses and groom.

Mrs. Selfe and the Frowdes soon formed a pleasant neighbourly acquaintance. Books and papers were exchanged, as were also gardening and knitting experiences, between Mrs. Selfe and Mrs. Frowde. Diana and Claudia were away when this acquaintance commenced, and when they came home Mrs. Frowde observed that Mrs. Selfe was unwilling that they should see her when she called. Also Mrs. Selfe seemed uncomfortable when in their presence. One day, out walking, Claudia met the Frowdes, and said:

"Oh, Mrs. Frowde, do please lend me some books. I am so dull at home, for my sister is away, and the house is so silent. The only cheerful sound I ever hear is Mr. Frowde's laugh from your garden."

"We've plenty of books," said Mrs. Frowde, "come and choose for yourself, and pray do come in whenever you like."

This led to many visits from Diana and Claudia, and also to an entire breaking off of the acquaintance between the Frowdes and Mrs. Selfe.

Mrs. Selfe seems to find it impossible to be friendly with anyone who likes her daughters.

Diana and Claudia found their visits to the Cottage so pleasant that they spent a great deal of time there. Their mother, annoyed at seeing them happy, forbade them ever to visit the Frowdes again. They respectfully declined to obey this order, as they were old enough to choose their own friends. Then they should be turned out of their home, their mother said. They reminded her that she was bound to provide for them by their father's will, but, on suitable provision being made, they were quite ready to leave home if their mother wished it. She was not inclined to make any provision, but intimated that at a convenient opportunity she should shut her doors against them, and give orders that they were not to be let into the house. They were then unable to go out together even in the garden, as one was always obliged to stay in to open the door to the other. So they took exercise by turns, and went to church by turns, and visited the Cottage by turns. Meanwhile they consulted a lawyer, and begged him to consult with the family lawyer to see if Mrs. Selfe could not be persuaded to act reasonably.

Mrs. Selfe, seeing how determined her daughters were, took occasion to say to Claudia, who she knew was the most timid, that she need not fancy that by one of them staying in the house they could not be turned out, for if necessary she would use force and send for a policeman. Poor gentle Claudia, who had no knowledge of law, pictured herself being forcibly turned out by a policeman, and was in terror till her sister came home. After this, Manly Frowde lent them a big hand-bell, which was to be rung out of window in case of emergency, and he would go to the rescue. No emergency arose, though there was a false alarm. Early one morning Mrs. Frowde heard a bell. Her husband had just finished his bath.

"Rush, Manly, rush," she said; "get some clothes on, and go as quick as possible; there's no knowing what distress those poor girls are in."

Mr. Frowde put on a few things and went to the top of the lane, where he could see the windows of the girls' rooms; but there were only a couple of maid-servants making the beds, and looking astonished to see Mr. Frowde in such an odd costume, earnestly staring up at the house. It was discovered that the bell belonged to a gang of travelling workmen who were breakfasting at the Pleiades.

Mrs. Selfe evidently found her daughters too much for her at this period. Their merry voices were a constant annoyance

to her. As she had entirely given up talking herself, except in ordering servants, it was a little annoying to hear her daughters talking and laughing with one another. So she invited to her house a lady whom she had described to Mrs. Frowde in their days of intimacy as a "very dear old friend." This dear old friend was a Mrs. Naylor, a little fat old woman of about sixty. She was what is called a well-informed woman—painfully well-informed—and was supposed to be very learned in chemistry. Indeed, she had written a book on chemistry, but has not yet found an appreciative publisher. Mr. Naylor was heard of, but never seen. He was in fact a male Mrs. Harris. His wife's allusions to him were perhaps not quite so frequent as were Sairey Gamp's to Mrs. Harris, but he was dragged in at convenient periods, as, for instance, when Mrs. Naylor was lecturing Claudia on the importance of obedience to her mother, even if her demands were unreasonable. She said that she had always done what Mr. Naylor bid her, although it might not have been pleasant to her. Considering the light in which she regarded her husband, perhaps it was hardly a compliment to her friend Mrs. Selfe to compare the two cases, for she evidently looked upon Mr. Naylor as a poor ignorant fellow, who was not fit for a companion to such a well-informed person as herself. No doubt Naylor was a jolly fellow, who, so far from asking obedience from his wife, was only too glad to be left alone. Probably he enjoyed his glass of port when he was beyond his wife's control. Mrs. Naylor sometimes alludes to a "babe" she once had (baby is too common-place a word for her), but this babe, fortunately for itself, did not live, or, to use Mrs. Naylor's own words, "It passed away from life when about ten months old." No other babe seems to have been born; and really, when we consider Mrs. Naylor's extraordinary fund of information, it is astonishing she could do anything so ordinary as produce a babe. Mr. Naylor's occupation is never disclosed, but from an anecdote of Mrs. Naylor's, he seems to be something in the *travelling* line. For she relates that once having appointed to meet her husband at an inn in a country town, where he would stay in the midst of his travels, she arrived at the inn before her husband, and asked to be shown into his room. The people of the inn did not believe she was his wife, and refused to admit her, so she had to wait outside till he came. Now whether Mrs. Naylor relates this to show that people at inns are not always courteous, or whether she thought she was so good-looking

that she might be mistaken for a mistress, it is impossible to say. It would require a great stretch of imagination to suppose that she had ever been anything but ugly. It is curious that a woman of Mrs. Selfe's understanding chose such extraordinary friends. But the reason is evident: Mrs. Naylor is a toady, and Mrs. Selfe likes a toady. Mrs. Naylor will agree with Mrs. Selfe in everything. She did not even speak to Diana and Claudia in their mother's presence, because she knew it would please Mrs. Selfe; but when she found them alone she would enter into conversation, and if Mrs. Selfe entered the room she would suddenly stop and look guilty. And when at dinner she was asked to have a glass of wine, she would cry out, "Oh, plenty!" before her glass was half filled, because she knew that Mrs. Selfe was a rigid water-drinker. And now that Mrs. Selfe had a companion with her, the girls could not always get the best of it in the matter of talking. For if their voices were heard above Mrs. Naylor's they were begged to be silent, and allow others to talk. They ought to have considered it a privilege to listen to the conversation of their mother and Mrs. Naylor. And that our readers may not miss that privilege, we will here give a specimen of it.

Mrs. Naylor: "Have you ever remarked the beautiful harmony of form and colour in a blade of grass? I assure you that, without going deeply into the study of botany, you would find a knowledge of the various idiosyncrasies of our most ordinary plants a very interesting pursuit. For example," here she places the first and second fingers of each hand together to emphasize the words, "take the common groundsel—to the eye of the casual observer it is a mere weed; but viewed under the magnifying powers of the microscope, its beauty of formation is really almost startling. How much this proves the wise supervision of a beneficent Providence even in the minutest of His creations!" At this point the girls gave a sigh of relief, as if the prolixity of the sentence and the length of the words had taken away their breath. But they are the politest of ladies, as everyone knows who has made their acquaintance, so they listened for their mother's reply.

"A——h!" said Mrs. Selfe, with a drawn breath something between a sigh and a groan, like a converted Methodist, "it does indeed! And how the progress of civilisation enables us more and more to discover this!"

Mrs. Naylor, profoundly impressed with this truth,

replies: "Assuredly so. This is indeed the age of discovery. What marvellous strides have been taken lately in the science of chemistry. Have you ever given your attention to the fusion of metals, and the influence of aluminum or lime-light on the ordinary oyster-shell? It is, I assure you, a most interesting experiment, and the effect is really dazzling. A dear friend of mine, now passed from this life, a man of fine culture and poetic temperament, who gave much attention to this science, describing to me his feelings on first witnessing this experiment, assured me that he was positively affected by the dazzling nature of the light—in his own words, it was like a glimpse of Heaven."

The two girls, finding their politeness stretched to the utmost in listening to Mrs. Naylor, began to wish she had also "passed away from this life," like her dear friend. They endeavoured to turn the subject, and that they might still keep the conversation up to the intellects of the two learned ladies, they thought they would be safe in mentioning authors. But, unluckily, having mentioned Manly Frowde, they brought from Mrs. Naylor the remark that he was too "latitudinarian," and that "latitudinarianism is not genius." Eight syllables was too much for them, so they gave up altogether and left their mother and Mrs. Naylor to converse alone.

The siege lasted about three months, and then Mrs. Selfe, being anxious to get rid of her daughters, and finding that they had friends who would not allow them to be ill-treated, gave way to the proposal of the family solicitor that a suitable provision should be made for them, and that they should make their home where they pleased. Most mothers will say that such a woman as Mrs. Selfe does not exist, or that her daughters must be very bad indeed, and deserved such treatment. All who know Diana and Claudia are charmed with them. They are as intellectual as they are beautiful, and their severe life has made them full of tenderness and kindness. They are delighted with their liberty, and have taken a little farmhouse in a midland county, where they live together very happily. They have visited Mr. Frowde several times, though it was difficult to persuade Claudia to come at first, as she suffered for months after leaving her mother with a nervous affection. We must not omit to mention that when they took leave of their mother they went to shake hands with her, and said they would come to her at any time she wished.

"Oh, you will! will you?" she said, and these were her last words to them. No kiss or kind wish. They never remember being kissed by her in their lives.

CHAPTER X.

BRIGHTON ROMANCE.

Some hearts are keen as diamond,
Some softer than the rose:
Ah! if they meet together,
And part in stormy weather,
How fast the life-blood flows!

THE amber-tressed, witch-eyed lady whom we have called Flora was known at the Grand Hotel as Mrs. Trevor. When she parted abruptly from Arundel Lifton, she by no means intended to desert the ball. But his cynical cruelty cowed her for the moment; and she ran upstairs to her own room, a sumptuous suite on the chief corridor—for Mrs. Trevor chose to live like a princess. Her maid, Estelle, had of course been watching the dance from without, and followed her mistress promptly. Mrs. Trevor was a creature of caprice, and it was nothing unusual for her to suddenly leave any place of entertainment. Estelle, a black-haired, black-eyed little French girl, sprightly though ugly, knew all her moods, and was astonished at nothing she did.

Flora threw herself into an easy-chair by her dressing-room fire, and buried her flushed face in her pretty plump hands, from which she had torn the gloves as if they fettered her. This man's contemptuous coolness maddened her. She was powerless against it. She, poor pretty little thing, had loved him, so far as there was room in her small heart for love: she adored the splendid style of the man, his lofty self-possession, the lordly ease with which he made his way through the world. He knew no difficulty. As to her, he had touched her lightly, and she fell into his hand like a full-ripe peach. Then there came the bitter-sweet delight of an unholy passion; then a cool dismissal, with most liberal arrangements. His words were too true: he had bought her, body and soul, and then thrown her aside in his first mood of weariness. She would have murdered him if she could.

Presently she looked up, and caught a glimpse of her maid reflected in the mirror over the mantelpiece.

"You are here, Estelle?" she said; "I came up because I was tired. I shall go down again, presently."

"Oh, yes, let Madame descend. The room is not so crowded; the hum-drum people go away. Let me arrange Madame's hair."

Deftly the girl replaced some wandering tresses, and put fresh flowers from a bouquet on the dressing-table, and cooled the heated face and hands with some dainty essence, and brought fresh gloves for those which lay in fragments on the ground. Then from a casket of gold-stoppered phials she took one, and poured into a small glass an oily green fluid, and offered it to Mrs. Trevor, who drank, and was refreshed.

"You are a good girl, Estelle," she said; "I will buy you something pretty when we drive out to-morrow."

"Thank you, Madame. But will you not come down? The gentlemen are all in despair because the most ravishing lady of all has left them."

Flora descended, looking radiant and feeling defiant. She had plenty of dances. She went into supper with a youthful peer—so youthful that he firmly believed she was as young as himself, though she might almost have been his mother. He was over head and ears in love with her at once, and showed it by blushing till he looked like a very pink baby, and by getting her every incongruous thing possible to eat and drink. She was forced to laugh at last when she found a plate before her containing lobster salad and a Neapolitan ice. The young noble was not at all disconcerted.

"Hem—you see—when a fellow's very happy—don't you know? he's rather off his head, you see. I put some beer into my own champagne, just now, 'pon honour, and it was all being so happy, don't you know?"

"If you have put any in mine I shall not forgive you," said Mrs. Trevor. "Just taste it, and tell me."

He obeyed.

"Oh, that is all right! And now it has passed from my lips to yours. I kissed the glass—I did indeed."

"I fear champagne and beer is rather an intoxicating liquid," said Flora. "Come, shall we have one more waltz?"

The boy was but too delighted. He went home in a glamour of ecstasy, fancying this beautiful creature loved him. She, who had only been amusing herself, went wearily to bed, being passively undressed by Estelle, who managed

her mistress to perfection. Flora slept a dreamless, health-giving sleep, notwithstanding her naughtiness—notwithstanding that hysteric moment when Lifton's contempt had driven her wild. Only a small brain lived beneath those amber tresses: only dull nerves worked through the lovely contour of that plastic form. It is the creature of small brain and dull nerve who cannot help being wicked. However, Flora slept; and when she woke about twelve o'clock Estelle was by her bedside with chocolate, and dainty rashers, and toast miraculously crisp and thin. In a vase on the table stood a superb bouquet of hot-house flowers.

"Where did they come from?" said Flora, sitting up in bed with a white shawl over her shoulders.

"I know not, Madame. They came by magic, I think."

As Estelle had received a sovereign to place them there quietly, her truthfulness may be estimated.

"Bring me the bouquet," said Mrs. Trevor. She looked at it carefully, and saw within its fragrant heart a something white. An emerald ring was wrapped in a piece of paper, whereon was written, in a somewhat boyish hand—

"*Flowers—for the goddess Flora.*"

"Can you guess who sent this, Estelle?" she said, trying the ring on her finger at once.

"Madame, no. How should I? Everyone adores you."

Flora lay there dreaming, with an amused smile. She was an indolent creature, and like to lie late in her delicate surroundings, making day-dreams of delight. She had been a constant reader of the flimsiest French novels: she had intoxicated her little brain with the absinthe-prompted sensuous love-lyrics of Alfred de Musset and Theophile Gautier. She dreamt of herself as an odalisque, a bayadère—a Venetian lady in her midnight gondola, bound on some mysterious mission of love; a wild Indian nymph, with dusky limbs, swinging in her hammock from a great tree above a giant river, and waiting for her lover. Such fancies, caught from the subtle song-music, mere foam-froth of the brain, wherein the French delight, were her morning enchantment. She would lie with closed eyes, fancying herself Murger's Musette, or De Musset's Marquesa d'Amaëguai, or Gustave Nadaud's fairy Ursula.

Estelle, a restless French girl, used to wonder how her mistress, wildly eager in pursuit of pleasure, could enjoy

these intervals of perfect indolence. Estelle had not been fed on the erotic literature of her country: she could read but little, and just sign her name. She had been apprenticed early to a Paris milliner, had shown such skill and taste that her mistress was sorry to part with her to a great lady who wanted a clever attendant. She had, on the death of her patroness, been engaged by Mrs. Trevor, to whom she was a faithful and attached servant. Yes, Estelle really liked her mistress, who was prodigal and kindly, and made the girl her companion. Estelle waited on Flora with absolute devotion, foreseeing all her fancies, and hastening to gratify them.

The indolent creature stirred by-and-by, threw off her reverie, stretched her plump arms, and thought she would face the sunshine. So Estelle dressed her, almost as a child is dressed, for she hated trouble, and her maid knew just the style that suited her, according to the weather and her complexion.

"Estelle," she said, trifling with a luxurious breakfast, "I want to drive before the sun is gone. I hate chill," she added, with a shudder. "You must come with me: look your best. I think I told them two o'clock; it is past that, surely."

"I will inquire, Madame," she said, and in a moment returned with, "The carriage waits." And very soon they were out behind a pair of respectable horses (not exactly matching the superb private teams that crowd the King's Road), driving up and down the most wonderful sea esplanade in the world. Mrs. Trevor was buried in white fur, for all the world like a strange snowbird with an amber crest; while Estelle, having the art of dress, contrived on such occasions to make herself look much more like a lady-companion than a lady's maid.

Presently they passed a fine four-in-hand—three chestnuts, and a bright bay as off-wheeler. Flora, who, like Pope's politician, "saw through all things with her half-closed eyes," saw who was driving. It was Arundel Lifton. He did not even see her, nor did Lord Arun, who was on the box with him. That off-wheeler had never been in a team before, and required Lifton's skill and strength to manage. There were a good many of Lifton's friends, male and female, who would have rejoiced to hear that bright bay had broken his neck.

This turn-out belongs to Lord Arun, an enthusiastic young peer, whom his cousin Arundel is driving fast to Avernus. Arun is twenty-two, and has about twenty thousand a year,

and does not know how to spend it, so it slips through his fingers like quicksilver. Lifton's great mining royalties are rumoured to bring him in three or four times that amount; but, though he spends money like a prince, he calculates to the last sovereign. He can tell at any moment, from a little memorandum book in his breast-pocket, what he is worth within a hundred or two; and it must be a complex question, for he has been a great investor, and has probably never spent half his income. He is a born calculator, with a Babbage's machine instead of a soul. Will he miscalculate for just once?

Young Lord Arun, who likes to outdo everybody in everything, has set up a famous four-in-hand, but does not drive it with perfect ease of mind. On the box beside his cousin he is quite easy, for he believes Lifton infallible. And Lifton can do most things. But the groom had remonstrated against putting in that bay mare, a new purchase, to drive along the King's Road. Lifton said calmly,

"Do as you are told, man. Give her room if she wants to kick. Put 'Short Tommy' inside."

Reader, can you place yourself in the position of a bay mare that, for the first time in her life, though heretofore she has known harness, finds herself with three others before a vaster machine than she has ever drawn, or helped to draw, trotting along that thoroughfare of multitudes. Never has she seen such sights; never has thong touched her on the flank with such decisive sharpness; never has silver bugle sounded behind her. If that mare's nerves are upset, who can blame her?

Upset they certainly were. As they turned eastward, just by the West Pier, her skittishness grew worse and worse.

"You'll never get her home," said Arun.

"Pooh!"

He had time to say no more, when a stupid flyman drew round from where he had been setting some one down right across the near leader. The fellow was not blind, only stupid with long years of adulterated beer. His wretched horse went down, and both shafts were broken. Lifton's off leader was an old hand, and tried to obey the rein; but the mare was frightened into madness, and kicked fiercely, and in pulling the coach across the road it took off the wheel of poor Flora's carriage, as she was returning from her drive. There was a regular spill. Lord Arun, seeing who it was, heedless of his own affairs, scrambled down to help the ladies. Lifton

took it all in at a glance, and at once meditated mischief. But he was looking to the horses. The mare lay on her side, moving convulsively. The three chestnuts were still, though shuddering with excitement.

"Her back's broken, I fear, Tyrrel," he said to the head groom. "She would have jumped right over that carriage if I hadn't struck her on the ears."

"You are quite right, sir. And my lord gave three hundred for her."

Lifton laughed. He knew the value of money well enough, but it always amused him to hear people lament the loss of it. He called to a sergeant of police who stood near.

"Sergeant," he said, "I must shoot this mare. Keep the people quiet."

There came a pistol shot, and the poor creature's career was ended.

"I never saw such a gentleman," said Tyrrel to one of his mates. "In course it was the right thing to do, for the poor mare was in misery and couldn't live; but I shouldn't have had pluck enough to do it."

Leaving whomsoever it might concern to clear away the wreck, Arundel Lifton walked to his hotel, and sat down to muse. The idea of Arun's being taken in Flora's net delighted him. He wished neither of them any harm, but he had a heartless pleasure in seeing other people go wrong. His contempt for mankind was so great that you might imagine his race had been crossed by a fiend. He laughed heartily over the thought of Arun and Flora making fools of one another. Both born to be fools, their meeting was a caustic comedy from the point of view of Mephistopheles.

"I'll leave them alone," he thought. "She'll say nothing to him about me, for fear of what might come out. She'll pretend not to know me, I expect. Oh, what a game she'll play with that poor boy, unless I interfere! He'll come and ask my advice: the man who asks for advice writes himself down an ass at once. He'll describe her as a pure simple creature—so sweet, so confiding, so intellectual! I can see exactly what Flora would seem to that boy. But, by Jove! the time goes on. I must write some letters."

He sat down and wrote about a dozen brief letters of business to various agents, in some of them enclosing cheques in others requiring remittances. Never a day passed but Arundel Lifton was in communication with the people he employed. Ringing for a waiter, he said,

"Send those letters to be registered, and bring me the receipts. I shall dine here alone to-night, at eight—fish and cutlets, and a bottle of Lafitte. If anyone inquires for me, I am not in the hotel, remember."

Then he went into a maze of complex calculations, which seemed to interest him strangely. He wrote a minute hand, and the figures ran beneath his pen with the swiftness of Atalanta. Had not the deep misfortune happened to him to be prodigiously rich, he would probably have been senior wrangler.

Meanwhile, Lord Arun and Mrs. Trevor—but really this demands a new chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

A FLUENT WOOER.

Little it matters how love's tale is told,
If comes therewith a radiant shower of gold.

FLORA was not hurt a bit, nor indeed was she frightened; but the incident was too striking a one for her to miss an opportunity. She fainted—that is to say, she sank languidly into Estelle's arms, with eyelids drooping, and had to be carefully carried upstairs into the hotel. A whole bevy of Brighton cavaliers attended her: foremost among them was young Lord Arun, who had fallen madly in love with her the night before, and had sent her a *gage d'amour* in the morning, and who now felt disposed to tear his hair because *his* four-in-hand had done this harm. There was a real sensation throughout the Grand Hotel, and all over Brighton, so soon as the news was known. Flora had been the belle of the balls—the despair of the men, and the envy of the women; and, by the time the dwellers in mansions at Kemp Town and Hove heard the story, of course it was stated that her injuries were so serious she could not live. But when Estelle had brought her to her room, and administered a glass of that mysterious cordial, she opened her eyes and sank back in her chair, and said,

"Oh, dear me, how dreadful it was!"

As a fact, Estelle was more frightened than her mistress;

and she was also a little hurt, for the edge of a wheel had bruised her shoulder; but the brave girl said nothing, and tended her mistress faithfully.

Presently came a knock at the door, and a card was brought —Lord Arun's of course. On it was pencilled, "May I see you? I am *so* anxious." Flora smiled, but did not blush or tremble: this boy's fancy amused her, but she had known a fierier if less noble love. She said:

"He may come, Estelle. Do I look very bad?"

"Madame looks charming," was the reply; and Lord Arun was admitted, and Estelle was glad to go to her room and bathe her hurt shoulder with warm water.

When Arun entered, Flora looked up at him with a lovely languor. She was no longer the gay bright rose of the dance; it was

"As if a flower should close and be a bud again."

There was dew in her eyes, a tremor on her lips, and a pained tone in her voice. This little born actress knew that for the moment she was the heroine of Brighton, and enjoyed the situation. She had been calmly studying how one of her French models would have acted at such a time.

"'Pon my life, Mrs. Trevor, don't you know?" said Lord Arun, "I'm mad my horses should have done such a thing. Are you dreadfully hurt? You always look lovely, you see, but it's so deceitful."

"I am only a little shaken, my lord—mentally rather than physically. The shock was sudden; but I am quite well, I assure you."

"By Jove! you know, it was awful. And I was so happy last night—never so happy, I declare—and now, 'pon honour, I'm the unhappiest man in Brighton, except the man that takes people's names down as they go into a ball."

Flora laughed at the comparison. Lord Arun had evidently pitied the gentleman told off for that duty, unaware that nothing would induce him to emulate those whom he had to note down.

"There is no need for you to be unhappy," she said, softly smiling like Lalage; "I am well, though tired. And I have some one to thank for this beautiful emerald ring, which I found in the heart of a bouquet of flowers. I wonder how these came into my room."

"When a fellow's happy, you know, and he knows why, he wants to make the person he knows why—no, I don't mean

that—I mean he wants to make somebody know it. Now, don't you see? I was happy, Mrs. Trevor, and I knew why: so I went to Bright's—he's got some good things—do you like the emerald, though? It looks jolly, on *your* finger."

She turned it round.

"I wish it were a magic ring," she said. "A ring that would make you invisible; then you could go and find out everybody's secrets. A ring that would make everybody tell you truth: Oh, I *should* like that! A ring that would make people love you——"

"That," interrupted Lord Arun, "don't you see? Mrs. Trevor, is just what you don't want. I believe you've got such a ring."

"Lord Arun," she said, "you are both witty and polite. You are generous, too; and I will keep your lovely emerald—as green as the shallow sea. But please don't give me anything more: people are so censorious. I'm obliged to be terribly careful, they *will* talk, and I have no father or brothers to protect me."

"Who'd dare to say a word, I want to know, against you? Might I, with your permission, wring his confounded neck? By Jove, you see, the world's full of scamps, male and female, and you never know, you know, who anybody is; but the scamp that would say a word against you, you see, must be about as bad a fellow as the fat man that called himself Tichborne. I don't like fat men, you know: do you?"

"I have not considered that subject," said Flora, with a light laugh; "but I think not. Fat men don't walk well or ride well. They haven't breath enough to talk. Their souls have more than they can do to keep their bodies alive. Let me see, though! I have heard there is one thing they can do: they can swim."

"Porpoises!" ejaculated Lord Arun. "But about those scamps—you see I'm a very good hand with a horsewhip, 'pon honour; and if there's anybody has said an impertinent word about you, give me his name and address, and by the lord he shall have it."

"Oh! Lord Arun, I did not mean that," she said, liking the young man's enthusiasm. "I mean that there are people who will talk about a solitary woman like myself, and that therefore you must not come and see me too often."

"I won't—no really I won't—shall we say twice a-day? I could bring you some fruit in the morning and some flowers in the evening, don't you know?"

She clapped her hands merrily.

"How delightful you are!" she said. "Twice a day! Why if you were to come but once a week all Brighton would chatter about us, and either say we were no better than we should be, or else that we were engaged."

"I don't want to be any better than I should be, you know, and you couldn't if you tried. And if Brighton likes to say we're engaged, by Jove, don't you see? let the rascals tell truth for once."

CHAPTER XII.

FAUST AND MEPHISTOPHELES.

He is the devil, not of superstition, but of knowledge.—CARLYLE.

LORD ARUN called on his cousin between eleven and twelve on the day after the crash. Lifton, in dressing-gown and slippers, with his untasted breakfast on the table, was smoking cigarettes and looking intensely bored. Lifton was always bored unless he was doing some sort of mischief. Lord Arun's arrival woke him up, and he said, gaily,

"Ah, Val, how are you? You are a youth of enterprise. What do you think of the pretty widow? Have you come to breakfast?"

"By Jove!" said Arun, "*Did* I breakfast before I came out? Yes; I had some prawns and a pint of hock. No: that was yesterday. Positively, Arundel, I don't think I have breakfasted."

"The boy's in love," said Lifton, with a smile. "Come, eat some breakfast, and let me hear your adventures."

He lifted a cover, but everything was cold. So he rang, and said to the waiter,

"Bring something hot. I forgot about breakfast. Be quick."

"I don't think I'm hungry," said Arun.

"Nonsense. Lovers always are. There is no business in life that requires more nutriment. You may make a speech fasting, or fight a duel, or play roulette, or ride a steeple-chase; but never make love to a woman without a rumpsteak and a bottle of Burgundy first.

A second breakfast arrived. Arun found he was immensely

hungry. Lifton's flagging appetite was revived by his cousin's arrival in an amorous state.

"I must drink her health in champagne this instant!" cried Arun, and rang the bell. "You never saw her equal. She's as innocent as—as Devonshire cream, and her lips, you know, are rosebuds and all that,—and as to her eyes, by Jove, sir! they gave me a pain just here," pointing to where he supposed his heart to be.

"Champagne is good for that malady," said Lifton. "And so you think her perfect? I knew you would."

"Why, you don't know her, you know, do you?"

"Know her? I know all women to be very much alike when they get hold of a young fellow like you, always looking at them through a rose-coloured glass. Come, we'll drink her health."

Arun tossed off the champagne, and refilled his glass, Lifton watching him with a contemptuous smile. The part of Mephistopheles (hater of light) had been played full many a time, but never more consummately than by Arundel Lifton.

"She really *is* a widow?" he said, interrogatively, sipping his wine with deliberation.

"Oh, yes. Sad story, you know—didn't tell me, too heart-rending. Married by force to some old miser, who plagued her to death, by Jove! always jealous, you know—died suddenly of losing sixpence, and left all his money to charities—luckily forgot to sign his will."

Here Arun paused to take breath, and his cousin said:

"If she didn't tell you this rubbish, how the deuce do you know it?"

"Read it in her eyes, you know. She's transparent, like—well, like a tank in the Aquarium."

"Bad comparison," said Lifton; "you can't look into those tanks without seeing something fishy."

"You may chaff. You don't know Flora—she's as pure as—this wine, and as delicate as—as—a cigar ash."

"That simile deserves a cigarette, and these are real Russians. I am glad you came in with your story, Val; I was most awfully bored. Is the wind in the east?"

"Didn't notice, 'pon honour. East is your right hand, isn't it? Yes, then it is in the east—blows straight from the Bedford, you know."

"Ah, I daresay it's all right. You have woke me up, Val. You are the most interesting fellow I know, now that you're in love. It's wonderful how it improves a young man. I've

never been able to fall in love myself: no heart, perhaps. I never met but one woman worth a man's regard, and I made her hate me."

A gloom fell for a moment on the countenance of this man, which never at any time looked cheerful. If Arundel Lifton could not love, he could hate; and a keen observer would have been horrified by the dark revenge that suddenly convulsed his features. Arun, at no time observant, was full of his passionate fancy for Flora. The champagne quickened his grotesque flow of eloquence.

"You must come and see her, by Jove, Arundel. What's that story—didn't we read it at Harrow?—of a judgment of beauty, you know, at Paris, about three goddesses? Never saw a goddess—gone out of fashion, haven't they? like big lizards and giants—but I'll back Flora against any of them."

Herewith he drank another bumper of champagne, and looked as triumphant as Apollo when he started in vain pursuit of Daphne, a story well told by Ovid and Matthew Prior. Then he said:

"Good-bye. Where do you dine? I'm off to see Flora."

"What a charming young fool he is!" said Lifton to himself, turning round to the fire, and taking another cigarette. Lifton possessed in perfection Talleyrand's two requisites to happiness—a hard heart and a strong stomach: but he had occasional fits of intolerable *ennui*. When in this case, wine was no stimulant—tobacco, or even opium, no sedative: all he could do was to endure to the end. It was not remorse, for he had none; nor dyspepsia, for his digestion would have suited a cassowary: it was more like the evil spirit which came upon King Saul, and filled him with a horror devoid of form or meaning—a vague, unfathomable depression, with no definite cause. Arundel Lifton looked moodily at the fire, smoking cigarettes without tasting them, drank several glasses of Chartreuse, yet felt no addition of warmth and vigour.

"I wish something would happen," he soliloquized. "Life is too easy, and I am getting bored."

There are men who are formed for a tempestuous life. It is just imaginable that in certain circumstances Arundel Lifton might have achieved a kind of gloomy greatness. Had he lived in time of revolution, his ambitious spirit might have caused him to grasp power with a resolute hand—to become a dictator or an emperor. He had no conscience, yet a clear judgment; no affection, but the wildest momentary passion; no knowledge of the meaning of love, but the faculty of hottest

hate. Only a few persons, however, did he deem worthy of hatred: for the mass of mankind he had a cool cynical scorn. Could Lord Arun, who, though flighty and thoughtless, was a really good-hearted fellow, have seen his cousin as he really was, he would have shrunk from him with horror. But Lifton had a curious fascination about him. Arun was one of many who admired him because they found him incomprehensible. When a man has a handsome figure, dresses to perfection, is brilliant in society, spends money lavishly, knows all the ways of the world, his acquaintances seldom inquire too curiously into his moral character. Lifton was known to have done one or two things that might possibly shock the clerical mind, but which in very high society were voted venial.

"Well," he thought, "I'll take a stroll, and see if this Brighton wind will blow away the blue devils. Val is playing his little comedy, I suppose: poor boy! the *dénouement* will be amusing—to me at any rate. How far shall I let him go? Would that trivial thing like to be Lady Arun? No; she shall not have that pleasure."

He strolled out on the Cliff. A real Brighton breeze was blowing, ruffling the sea, driving the white sails, making the ladies' faces ruddy, and giving to their dresses a bewitching disorder. It did not blow away Lifton's blue devils.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRISTMAS AT COPSE HILL.

The mesmerizer snow.—BROWNING.

THEY all lay late in bed that morning. Certes, they had sat up into the short hours, chatting over many things, making verses for the huge folio lettered "Copse Hill Rhymes," which lay on one of the bookshelves; talking much nonsense and no scandal, and enjoying "the sweet o' the night." But they had to turn in at last: only the master of the house, when everybody else had sleep upon the eyelids, dreamless and calm, took pen in hand and worked away for an hour or

two. "One hour after midnight is worth two before," he was wont to say: and on that principle he acted.

However, he was up at nine, for it was Sunday morning, on which day, for some mysterious reason, the post at Copse Hill goes out at half-past ten. By this wise arrangement the letter carrier is effectually prevented from going to morning service; so indeed is Mr. Frowde, who, having perhaps a dozen letters to write by 10.30, can hardly breakfast and reach the church by eleven. As the letters are simply carried to Two Bridges, about three miles away, and remain there till nine in the evening, this regulation savours not much of the wisdom of Solomon.

As we have said, they lay late, with a depth of sleep under them—the hypnotism of heaven. When at last they lazily went to their windows, and drew the curtains, and looked out upon the lawn, behold! it was white with snow, and snow still fell in thick heavy flakes, and all the evergreens were loaded. There was a simultaneous shiver, and everybody rang for warm baths at once.

Who were these Sunday sleepers who listened, let us hope regretfully, to the church bell, muffled by the snow? The hosts are Mr. Frowde and his wife; the guests are Diana and Claudia Selfe, and Froude's cousin, Henry Branscombe—like him in many things, except that he is not so big, wears spectacles, and makes money in a much easier and faster way than by writing books. It is almost twelve when these lazy people come down to their matutinal meal.

Diana and Claudia, dressed in perfect taste, are warming their white fingers before the book-room fire, quite ready for the meal—half breakfast, half lunch—which is just now ready for them.

"What time did you go to bed, Manly?" said his cousin. "You don't look much the worse for late hours."

"I did not notice," he said; "I think it was about four. Come, Harry, wake up, and give the ladies some devilled turkey. I've a right to be lazy, for I've written a dozen letters this morning."

"Do you like snow, Diana?" said Mrs. Frowde.

"Not in the hunting season," she replied. "I like the sleepy feeling it gives one."

"Oh, so do I," said Claudia; "but isn't thaw hateful? I call it *mean* for that beautiful white snow, that makes Mr. Frowde's white pigeons look dirty, to melt away into a nasty filthy slush."

"By Jove, Claudia, you remind me that my pigeons have had no breakfast. These letters early in the morning are an offence against civilization."

Opening a French window, he threw handfuls of peas to the beautiful white birds, who came with alacrity and then fluttered away to drink upon a stone vase of water close at hand. White as they were, the snow made them anything but white; but a pair of black carriers and a splendid cock blackbird, that came close up to the window in search of food, were deeper than the hue of ebony.

"Look at that dear bird," said Claudia. "Shall I give him some crumbs, Mr. Frowde?"

"You're a black ouzel yourself, Claudia, so it's only right you should help your kin."

"I suppose that's a compliment," she said, tossing out some crumbs, which soon attracted not only the blackbird, but his mate also, and a hundred or so of sparrows, and two cock robins who immediately engaged in mortal combat, and a missel-thrush, and two or three greenfinches. Meanwhile an atom of a titmouse was clinging with his claws to a bit of meat, suspended by twine to an ash bough near, and pecking away with great satisfaction.

"I like birds," said Frowde. "What life they give to the world?"

"What is your favourite bird?" asked Diana. "Being a poet, the nightingale, I suppose."

"No," interposed Claudia; "the eagle, which soars with undazzled eyes towards the sun at noonday."

"You have been reading Milton's prose works, Claudia. I should think the favourite bird with you two girls is the lark."

"It certainly is," said Diana, gravely. "Our life at Millbrook may be thus defined: we rise with the lark, we work and amuse ourselves all day, and are as merry as larks the whole time, and we very often get a lark in the evening."

"Rather different from your previous life," said Mrs. Frowde. "What a treat to be free! I wonder how, with such a childhood of tyranny, you are so full of energetic life. It would have made some people stupid for ever."

"There were two of us, you see," said Claudia; "and we kept up each other's spirits. I don't care to remember it. It is a luxury to be free at any rate, as you say; and we contrive to live a tolerably happy life."

"An ideal life, in my judgment," said Frowde; "you have

no troubles, except when your pony or your maidservant gets too frisky. You have heaps of pleasant friends without any ostentation—people who like you for your own sakes. You have a guide, philosopher, and friend in that dear old agricultural gentleman who rides straight across country. When you find the winter evenings slow, you can write a sensation story, and illustrate it yourselves, or make double acrostics, or learn Latin for the sake of writing it on post-cards."

"That last is an excellent idea," said Claudia. "Give us a *Gradus ad Parnassum*—is that right?—and we'll do it. I believe that writing post-cards in an unknown tongue would make a great many village postmistresses go raving mad. We'll take to Latin, Diana."

The snow fell fast. They could hardly see the people returning from church. Mr. Bonfellow had preached a short sermon—a wise custom of his: the two or three country squires were driving home to lunch; the commonalty were trudging through the heavy snow to their dinners of pork and bacon.

"Not many people in church this morning," said Frowde. "Hallo! Harry, what are you doing?"

"Making myself useful," he said. He had stretched himself on the hearthrug, a favourite position with him, and was carefully placing chestnuts on the bars of the grate to roast. Suddenly one of them burst, and the fine flour came all over his face, making him look like a miller.

He jumped up as if he had been shot, and everybody laughed.

"That's a chestnut wasted," he said, "and no doubt the best of the lot—the fairest of the flock, in fact. If the particles could be carefully collected from my face with a spoon I think perhaps they might be utilized."

Saying which, he went sadly upstairs to regain his ordinary appearance.

"Now," said Claudia, "let's eat all the rest of the chestnuts while he's away."

The malicious suggestion was accepted at once. He looked, on his return, with horror at the empty bars.

"At one fell swoop!" he exclaimed, and went into the dining-room to get more nuts.

Snow is a pleasant and picturesque thing to watch; but when you are kept indoors by it on Sunday in the country it grows monotonous. The ladies must not use their fingers, and ladies hate sitting still without using their fingers. The

men may smoke if they like; but neither Frowde nor Branscombe liked.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty is to know how to amuse children on Sundays. Dolls and dolls'-houses, carts and horses, puzzles and games, and all the fascinations of the nursery, must be gathered up on Saturday night and put into a cupboard out of sight. Dolly may perhaps be most fondly loved and admired, be carefully undressed and put to bed, and as carefully dressed in the morning, six days out of the seven; but on the seventh day she is concealed in a dark cupboard, where her poor little mistress goes occasionally to take furtive looks to see if she is all right. Some parents manage to quiet their consciences by letting their children have a Noah's ark. It is Scriptural they say. Also a puzzle of the map of Palestine is allowed; no other part of the world would be considered orthodox. Our friends were discussing Sunday recreations when Harry Branscombe suggested that chess might be proper if the pieces had Scriptural names, but the ladies voted him irreverent.

The afternoon passed pleasantly enough. They turned over various books, read snatches of verse, criticized the critics, finally had some tea. Just as it was brought in, all the dogs in the place barked furiously, and they saw at the front gate a man on horseback. He rode deliberately towards the front door. Diana and Claudia watched him with all their eyes. He was a good man on a good horse—that they could see, being pretty keen judges of both horses and men.

"Who's this comes riding o'er the snow?" said Frowde to Diana. "I must go and see."

There was expectation among the ladies while the newcomer got rid of his riding-coat, while his horse was taken to a stable. He entered: everyone liked his looks: after a sharp ride he was glad of a cup of warm tea with some whisky therein. When he began to thaw he also began to explain himself.

"You haven't introduced me, Mr. Frowde," he said.

"By Jove, no more I have!" This was a constant failing of his, for which his wife was always scolding him. "Mr. Sebright," he went on; "met him at Venice—Mr. Sebright, Miss Selfe—&c., &c., &c."

"You're a nice fellow at an introduction," said Mrs. Frowde. "These two young ladies, Mr. Sebright, are the Misses Selfe, great friends of ours; and this is our cousin,

Mr. Branscombe—and we are all delighted to see you for your own sake, and because anybody would be welcome in such weather. Now let me order something to eat. You must be hungry after your ride."

"Thank you, just a biscuit or sandwich," said Sebright.

"And I am sure you will stay to dinner, and remain the night with us," said Mrs. Frowde.

Sebright did not object. When the order had been given, he turned to his hostess and said:

"My father and mother were called away the day before yesterday to my grandfather's brother, up near York, who is immensely old, and supposed to be dying. My mother is his only niece, and I suppose he'll leave her a lot of money. Well, they went. I was left alone, with exactly nine people within three miles, and three of the nine as deaf as a post. Well, I got through yesterday with a long ride, and dined alone without knowing what I ate, and went to bed early. But before I went I thought of you, Mr. Frowde, and I remembered Mrs. Frowde's kind invitation; so I gave my man orders for my horse to be ready to-day at twelve, for I was determined to come, whatever the weather might be. I had quite forgotten it was Sunday. I hope you don't think I am very wicked, Mrs. Frowde."

"Very shocking, indeed," said Mrs. Frowde in fun, "but you can receive absolution from our good parson, Mr. Bonfellow, for he is coming to lunch with us to-morrow."

"Have you yet made up your mind about taking orders?" said Manly Frowde.

"No, though my father still urges me," he replied.

"I suppose you spend Christmas with your family," said Mrs. Frowde.

"It seems very probable that my family will be represented entirely by myself, and that I shall dine in solitary state, with a turkey and plum-pudding all to myself."

"Oh, you cannot possibly do that," said Mrs. Frowde, "I must insist on your staying with us, if you do not mind our humble entertainment."

"Thanks, you are too kind," said Jack Sebright. "The fact is the mater always likes me to be at home at Christmas time, and we generally have a maiden aunt and a couple of cousins of the old-young lady style to stay with us; but I heard from my father this morning that the old gentleman is much worse, and they are not at all sure of being home by Christmas day; so they have put off my aunt and cousins. I

can't say I'm sorry, for the three ladies think it necessary to lecture me on my undutiful conduct to my father in not taking orders."

"Then you will dine with us, Mr. Sebright, won't you?" said Mrs. Frowde.

"I fear that I shall be an intruder in a family gathering."

"We can hardly be called a family gathering," said Manly Frowde, "which is perhaps all the better, as there is no fear of lecturing or quarrelling."

"I must go home to-morrow afternoon," said Jack Sebright, "and wait for news on Christmas morning. If I find my father and mother are not coming home on that day, I will, with your permission, Mrs. Frowde, come over to dine with you."

At this moment Diana and Claudia went into the garden to find leaves and berries to wear in their hair at dinner. Harry Branscombe followed them.

Mr. Frowde's garden is separated from Winterslow by a lane. At the top of this lane is the entrance-gate to Winterslow; and nearly opposite is a small private gate into Mr. Frowde's garden, but so overhung with foliage that it is scarcely visible. It is seldom used, as there is no thoroughfare in the lane, and would only be of service if a friendly neighbour were living at Winterslow, as it makes a short cut between the houses. Claudia and Diana were near this gate, trying to get some ivy that had been protected from the snow, when Harry Branscombe shouted—

"Diana! Claudia! Look what lovely red berries there are in your mamma's hedge. Shall I go and steal some?"

"Oh! do," said Diana and Claudia both at once; and they rushed through the wicker-gate after Harry, and almost ran against their mother. Mrs. Selfe was coming home from afternoon church, and in walking up the lane had been keeping close to Mr. Frowde's palings, as there was a little path which had been kept free from the snow by the palings and trees above.

"Good gracious, Di!" said Claudia when they had retreated, "what will she say? She must have heard our conversation all the time. And oh, Mr. Branscombe! she will think us so wicked for allowing you to call us by our Christian names. Oh, I shan't dare to go out again while we are here."

"What nonsense!" said Diana; "it is no good to fret ourselves about her: it won't do any good. We have had misery

enough, and now we must make the best of things and be happy. I shall not let her spoil my enjoyment."

There was a general good-fellowship amongst all the people who met at Mr. Frowde's house, and a preference for Christian names which would be considered very wrong by people who find it necessary to be ruled by fashion and ceremony. "Familiarity breeds contempt" applies only to people who cannot afford to be familiar.

What were Mrs. Selfe's feelings when she suddenly saw her daughters? It is impossible to say. That calm pale face shows no sign of emotion. It is horrible to imagine that a mother can hate her own children—and only children. Some warm-hearted mothers will say that it is impossible. They will say that Mrs. Selfe must have loved her children, and that they did not understand her. It may be so; but the children certainly did not realize her love.

Mrs. Selfe dined in her usual solitary way that evening.

"Missis looks duller than usual," said the servant in waiting, to the cook. "I suppose it's because the young ladies are next door."

"Poor dear young ladies!" said the cook. "I wish it could all be made right, and they could come home again, for I am sure they mean no harm. But I daresay they are happier away. It is a dull house for them, with never any company, and no good dinners to send up."

The next day Mrs. Selfe posted a letter to her house-agent, in which she told him that she had quite decided to let her house, and begged that Mr. Temple might be informed of her decision as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VICAR.

THE OLDEST INHABITANT:

He has a natural Christianity
Born with him; no deep theologian he,
With explanations of the original text,
To make the old women stare; nor yet a fancy
For chirping boys with nightgowns o'er their jackets,
And lighted candles, stinking incense, mummery
The girls delight in. No; he's kind to the poor,
And doesn't ask them prying insolent questions.

THE TRAVELLER:

He's a good fellow.

Old Play

THE next morning Frowde was busy, having work to get off by the post, and well aware that he should find little time between luncheon and dinner, with guests in the house. And, as Mrs. Frowde was engaged in those mysterious affairs of state which on Monday mornings seem to occupy married ladies who are their own housekeepers, the other four were left to entertain each other. The snow had ceased; the sky was full of light, and cloudless; it was still freezing, and the pigeons, after vainly pecking at the thick ice in their drinking-vase, were scattered over the lawn, refreshing themselves with snow-crystals. The elastic air trembled with life.

"Can't we take a walk?" said Claudia. "There are two good hours to luncheon. I know the neighbourhood well, and can take you a pleasant tramp."

"You were lost in the woods once, you know, Claudia," said her sister.

"Well, we're not going into the woods to-day. Come, get ready, all of you. An hour out and an hour home will be eight miles."

"Good walking for ladies," said Sebright.

Yet they did it, meeting a keen east wind as they went, but religiously keeping to time and distance before turning. Sebright soon became a favourite. He was as full of fun as any boy. They ran races, and he showed himself as much swifter of foot than the ladies as they than Branscombe. He could not see a gate without vaulting it, nor an old woman without inquiring about her family, as if he had known her

for ages, and giving her a shilling as a Christmas-box. They came to a long shallow pool, where the boys had made a capital slide, and were "flying the garter" with a crowd of little girls looking on. He tossed a pocketful of coppers on the ice, and soon the youngsters were tumbling over one another in a most amusing scramble. Then he went down the long slide himself in a masterly manner; whereupon Branscombe, not to be outdone, though he had never been on the ice in his life, tried to follow him, and sat down ignominiously, amid a scream of laughter from the children.

"Now, young ladies," cried Sebright, "come and slide! You've done it hundreds of times, I know."

Diana and Claudia *had* done it hundreds of times, and they could not resist the temptation now; and, faith, it was a pretty sight to see the two trim-ankled lasses flying along the ice, putting Branscombe, whose intractable feet would *not* keep together, to utter shame, and responding thoroughly to Sebright's school-boy exclamation,

"Keep the pot boiling!"

"What would mamma have said if she had passed?" said Claudia to her sister.

Oddly enough, the old lady had driven past, and recognised her daughters; but they, breathlessly intent on keeping up the steam, were happily ignorant of it.

"Feel sore, Mr. Branscombe?" quoth Sebright, as they strode along, whereat the ladies laughed.

"Not a bit. I only came down five times. I believe with practice I should slide better than you do."

Whereat the ladies laughed again.

The merry party came in warm and cheerful, hungry and thirsty, with reddened skins and tingling pulses. Fight King Winter while ye are young, and you will not dread him in age. The constitutions of men and women of a strong race like the English are capable of almost anything: but too often they are seriously injured in youth by mismanagement; and the present mania for rapid, and, in some cases, excessive education, seems likely to increase their injury. It was a saying of the Duke of Wellington's that a man might be educated beyond his mind. Physical education should be the first thing. Many of our ablest men have died before their time because their precocity was encouraged in boyhood to the detriment of their bodily health. Jack Sebright was an admirable specimen of the opposite system. The Rev. Marston Sebright saw that his boy was not brilliant; but he

saw that he had sound sense, and that completeness of corporal form which is given to one man in a thousand—more likely one in a myriad. From his childhood young Sebright was encouraged in all manly exercises: he rode a wild little Exmoor pony at five; he swam by instinct when they put him in the sea; he boxed, fenced, boated, with a natural aptitude. Then his father began cautiously with a little Latin and Greek, and mathematics, and Jack went at it as he would have gone at a ride across country. His memory, which really is a physical faculty, retained everything: his understanding, or apprehensive power, was as clear in reference to what he had to learn as it was with regard to his physical pursuits; but his reasoning faculty moved slowly, and his imagination slowlier still.

"Never mind," said the Rector, talking over these things to his wife; "he'll mend by-and-by. He'll have to reason when he begins theology, and when he gets among the girls his imagination will be stimulated."

"Oh, Marston, what an odd idea!" said the lady.

"Which of the two, dear?"

She put down her knitting to reflect.

"Well, I meant about the girls," she said. "But the other seems quite as odd, for I never could see any reason, in what they call theology."

The Rector laughed.

"There is a great deal, I assure you; but it is much tangled by unreasoning people. Jack shall go at logic before he begins theology. As for the imagination, why, it would have no work to do if the world had no women in it."

Jack Sebright had by this time gone through his logical course, and was perplexed by his course theological. But his imagination still slept. He thought Diana and Claudia, for instance, jolly girls, capital comrades, full of fun and wisdom; he was particularly fond of ladies' society, and had a natural chivalry beneath his strong animal spirits.

The Vicar was in Frowde's book-room by the time the ladies were ready, and greeted his ex-parishioners with much friendship, and was introduced to Sebright.

"I have heard of your father often," he said, "but we do not happen to have met."

"He stays very much at home," said Jack. "Being unable to do any work in the Church, he is rather disappointed; but he wants me to make up for it, and become a bishop, like my grandfather."

"And why not?" said Mr. Bonfellow.

But at this moment luncheon was announced—in a larger room than you would have suspected the cottage to possess, the design of the hostess.

"You must have found your walk cold," said the Vicar to Claudia.

"Not at all. We defied the east wind. We ran races. We enjoyed a slide. I am as warm as a baked apple!"

"Who was the best slider?" asked Mrs. Frowde.

"Mr. Branscombe," said Diana gravely; "and the best runner too. Wasn't he, Mr. Sebright?"

"Indeed he was."

"Harry, I'm proud of you," said Frowde.

Harry only laughed. If he could not slide, he could do certain things of more value to himself and the world than sliding.

"The Wemyses have left, have they not, Mr. Bonfellow?" said Claudia. "Who lives there now?"

"A new parishioner of mine, of whom I know nothing except that he is a thorough gentleman, and has the house full of books."

"A bachelor?" asked Diana.

"Good-looking?" asked Claudia.

"Natural questions from ladies," said Frowde.

"I presume he is a bachelor or widower," said the Vicar, "since I saw no signs of a lady. I think he is more in your line than mine, Mr. Frowde, for he is full of pleasant but crudite talk, which I cannot always follow."

"If he is old enough to be a widower," remarked Diana, "I shall take no interest in him."

"Don't decide in a hurry, Miss Selfe," replied the Vicar. "He's a man in his prime, and a very fine-looking man too. My notion that he might be a widower was because it seemed unlikely that a man of his style should have reached his prime without marrying. But I am really no judge of character, I have seen so little of human life as yet. I gathered that he had been a great traveller and a great reader, and I really think, Mr. Frowde, you and he would suit each other."

"Has he many visitors?" asked Mrs. Frowde.

"Does he keep a carriage and pair? you should ask, child," said Frowde. "If he does, though he has got his money by fraud and expends it with meanness, all the carriage-and-pair people in the neighbourhood will call on him. I'll wager you a pair of gloves against a cigar that nobody but the Vicar and the grand old General has called on him."

"Not mamma?" said Claudia. "She likes anything new."

"Your mamma keeps a carriage and pair. So does the General—two or three, I believe: but he belongs to an age of chivalry, not to these times of meagre ostentation. Should I win my wager, Mr. Bonfellow?"

"I think you would," he replied.

"There's a saying of Savage Landor's," said Frowde, "that those who visit can neither do much nor anything well. I act on this principle, and very likely Mr. Forncett does the same."

"I have never read Landor," said the Vicar; "who was he?"

"The most distinguished man that was ever educated at Rugby."

"What an unfair reply!" said Mrs. Frowde; "he was a great poet, famous long before Byron, and was at Rugby long before Arnold was master."

"Did he keep a carriage and pair?" asked Diana.

"That seems a very important question about here," said Jack Sebright. "I *have* kept a carriage and pair—that is to say, a tandem cart—and should have been sent down in consequence, if my grandfather hadn't been a bishop. After that, who would not adhere to the Established Church?"

Dried fruit of winter had followed luncheon, with cigarettes for the gentlemen.

"You have not decided whether you will take orders?" said the Vicar cheerfully.

"I am sure you would preach well," interrupted Claudia, "and not be too long."

"I fear I should be a regular duffer, Miss Selfe. Well, Mr. Bonfellow, there are two strong reasons why I cannot make up my mind to be what my father and mother earnestly wish. I do not think I am fit to stand up in the pulpit to teach people older and wiser than myself. I am not thinking of the gentry. I could be satirical on their vices and follies, male and female: but when I looked down to the back benches of the church, and saw faces wrinkled with trouble, and limbs weakened by the toil of half-a-century, and eyes longing for a vision of heaven to console them for the long weary misery of earth, I should break down, Mr. Bonfellow, I know I should. What am I to teach such people? They are nearer God than I am. What could a mere boy like me say at the death-bed of an old man or woman who

had known seventy years of hard work, and hard living, yet been true to the Christian faith all through? I dread the idea."

Yet the Rev. Marston Sebright thought his son had no imagination.

"Go on," said Frowde, seeing that he had grown quieter after a few puffs at his cigarette. "What is your other difficulty?"

"Creed," he replied. "What is truth? What am I to believe and teach, amid this conflict of creeds? Are certain genuflexious and gesticulations necessary to salvation? Whom am I to follow, amid the innumerable teachers and squabblers of the time?"

"Christ," said the Vicar quietly. "Study the Gospels, and leave all other theology alone."

"Perfect advice," said Frowde. "Depend upon it, Sebright, that your very scruples form a guide for you. The young fellow who takes holy orders without thought of these things proves his own unfitness. Give no more study to the Thirty-nine Articles; take Mr. Bonfellow's counsel, and read the Gospels—*without* the commentators, who give you comparisons and discrepancies which are utterly valueless. Leave Paul alone for the present. If you want Christianity reconciled to the present time, read Coleridge's *Church and State.* I have a copy to lend you, but you don't want it yet."

"Meanwhile, will you lend it me?" said the Vicar. "I am sorry to say I have not read it."

"It is at your service. As to your other difficulty, my dear boy, I think Mr. Bonfellow will say that to see it is to conquer it. By no means dart satire at the front seats—at the wealthy squire whose cottages are pig-styes—at the young hunting-man who would fain look younger, and who ogles the girls and wears a flower in the button-hole of the coat for which Poole is yet unpaid. The time may come for this. Preach first of all the gospel of great joy: speak to those who have endured toil and trouble of the exceeding great reward. I have no patience with satirical or damnatory or casuistical preachers, when the earth is full of the goodness of God as the waters cover the sea. There, that's my lecture; and the ladies are 'dratting' me, if you know what that means."

"It is rather a long story," said Mrs. Frowde; "but if you come over on Christmas Day, Mr. Sebright, there must be no theology."

"I should think not," said Branscombe. "Theology at

Christmas! No. Roast beef, plum pudding, mince pies, devilled turkey, punch, snapdragon, forfeits, mistleto, and Sir Roger de Coverley."

"Yes," said Diana; "and if you're a good boy, Mr. Branscombe, when you wake up with the grandfather of headaches on Wednesday morning, I'll administer the best of all possible cures."

As Jack Sebright rode homewards over the snow—a long ride and a bitter one—he pondered much on the conversation that has been recorded.

CHAPTER XV.

FIDUS ACHATES.

Where will you find an honest serving man,
Staunch as Eumæus to the Ithacan?
Foolish indeed the master who relies
On the new race of sluggards and of spies.

When Mr. Forncett at length took possession of his new residence, he found everything exactly as he liked it. Ralph knew his idiosyncrasy, and had indeed come to like very much what his master liked—even to books. Not that he read such books as pleased Mr. Forncett: he loved travel-books, especially if full of adventure, impossible or otherwise. He liked Gulliver, and Crusoe, and even Münchausen; but perhaps his chief favourite was an English version of that father of historic romance, Herodotus. Indeed, he had read prose translations of Homer, and believed in all the wonders of the Odyssey. But modern books of travel also delighted him, and when Mr. Forncett bought new ones, they were always passed on to Ralph.

The Birches had been built by an architect (if that is the proper word) with rather queer ideas; the rooms were for the most part good, and all lofty, but some of them had no *raison d'être*. For example, on the left hand of the front door was a small room, which was dignified with the name of a breakfast-parlour. That room cost Ralph half-an-hour's reflection.

"Breakfast-parlour, eh?" he soliloquised. "The master wouldn't like that, I fancy. Why, he wouldn't have room to

stretch his legs, much less to walk up and down now and then, talking to himself, or to me, or to Foxy." Foxy was an amiable but gallant bulldog who never took notice of anybody but his master and Ralph, and the expression of whose eyes were so menacing that no boy had ever had pluck enough to throw a stone at him. "No," continued Ralph, "that won't do; but the little hole will do well enough for my traps, and the window looks right up the path to the gate, so I can be ready for tramps."

It was one of the inconveniences of The Birches that there was no entrance for tradesmen; so that everybody had to pass the front door with their goods: this was among the minor annoyances which decided Mr. Wemys to leave. When elegantly-dressed ladies are being handed into a handsome carriage, a butcher's boy carrying a tray rather spoils the scene. It is odd how often country builders make this and similar mistakes in really good houses.

So Ralph took possession of what had been called the breakfast-room, and filled it with the things he liked to have always at hand. It was a heterogeneous assortment, not easily described; for in his wanderings with Mr. Forncett he had been accustomed to consider many implements indispensable which could scarcely be of much service in quiet Oakshire. Those workmanlike corkscrews have seen service in many lands, and will be useful in this still retreat, where wine and ale are not wholly forsworn; but those revolvers and derringers, with the brightest barrels in the world, are now on the retired list. A dagger of Toledo, "the ice-brook's temper," rests closely to a many-bladed clasp-knife by Rodgers; a collection of tomahawks and boomerangs is in close proximity with cricket-bats and boxing-gloves. Ralph looks round on these and a hundred other things with great satisfaction: they all have their history, and he wishes he could write it down.

"What a book it would make!" he thinks. "I wish I could write like Captain Gulliver. It seems easy enough, when you read it: but only try. I wonder if that book-writer they say lives opposite could put me up to the trick. Wouldn't it be rare fun on winter evenings?"

It was breakfast-time at The Birches, one fine frosty morning in January. Forncett stood with his back to a blazing fire, looking through a bookseller's catalogue, the only missive brought him by the post. Ralph had deposited a cover on the "footman" in front of the fire, and placed a

coffee-pot in the neighbourhood of his master's seat at table. Between master and servant there was an obvious likeness, such as may often be seen in people who have been close comrades for a long time. Ralph was half-an-inch shorter than his master, and about five or six years older; both had brown hair and blue eyes—those pellucid eyes which owe their strange brightness to temperate living and much exercise in the open air. These two men had lived for many years a life of easy activity, and were consequently in first-class form. Either would have started at once for a forty mile walk, and reached the end of it without weariness and with a noble appetite. Both were tough as steel, and liked muscular exertion for its own sake. Mr. Forncett liked mental exertion also, though he wisely refrained from giving the world the fruits of it.

"I shall ride somewhere this morning, Ralph," said Mr. Forncett, looking up from his broiled game. "Grum hasn't had much exercise of late."

Now Grum was the cob, a most important member of the household. He was an Irish horse, of wonderful strength and cleverness; a rather dark chestnut, with a small white star on his forehead—a capital weight-carrier, witha fine stride and game to run up a stone wall.

Mr. Forncett rode Grum to the top of Copse Hill, and looked around him. How many a time, he thought, in his days of far travel, had he ascended some such hill, and seen beneath him the wildest scenery. An unexpected lake, a ruined city, with idols of a forgotten faith and inscriptions of an undecipherable language, a forest of enormous trees, a fissure in the earth of immeasurable depth, a camp of some wild people—such sights as these he had come upon suddenly. Now, riding to the summit of a hill, he saw the comfortable warmth and wealth of well-taxed, well-policed England around him. Here a great castle; there the grand stand of a race-course; at other points a military college, a lunatic asylum, the vast mansions of a duke, an ambassador, a newspaper proprietor;—on all hands towers and spires of village churches, centres of Christian love; woods alive with pheasants, long stretches of well-cultivated land, a railway to the south, alive with screaming trains. A kind of restraint seemed to surround him: he longed for a hundred leagues of prairie. He took the best substitute to be found—a canter on the common land which runs parallel with the high road for a mile or two eastward. It was the road to Medenhythe, which as yet he had not

explored. When it opened out into a wide heath, with avenues and clumps of trees, which he saw would look beautiful in summer, he turned northward, and gave Grum his head, and galloped till he came to a quaint village close to the river—a village dear to boating-men and brethren of the angle, whose snug inns were ruled by friendly landladies, with wonderful recipes for dressing eels, and for making the most nutritious of pies. At one of these, whose sign came from the Apocrypha, being indeed Tobit's Dog, Mr. Forncett stayed to refresh himself and Grum, being chiefly inclined thereto by a desire to see what manner of people he had chanced upon. By the aid of the landlady's famous pies and some good bitter ale, he made a hearty lunch, and was surprised at its cheapness. Then he rode home again, resolved that on the coming of summer he would have a boat on the river.

In this way, riding or walking, did Mr. Forncett spend most of the fine days; and luckily it was a fine keen season—weather dear to men with strength enough to enjoy it. If it rained, he settled down among his books, and pursued various out-of-the-way studies which were his fancy. He was, in his way, a contented man: yet those studies of his were very much in the line of Byron's well-known requirement—something rough to break the mind on. When Frank Forncett, years before, turned his face westward, and made in time the circuit of the world, he was haunted, whether in crowded city or on solitary mountain, by one beautiful sad face. It haunted him still. Not Care, but ruined Love, sat behind the headlong horseman, pursued the solitary walker, dwelt in the library of the untiring student. Time had mellowed the vision, investing it with a soft and subdued melancholy; but it held its own against all beauty of flesh, all wonder of wit, all glory of apparel; and Frank Forncett, for the sake of one woman who never could be his, treated all other women with a distant courtesy.

Just now, however, it becomes our duty to introduce him to a lady. Diana Selfe had strolled out one afternoon with Mr. Frowde to meet the postman, who brought that imperious necessity for a publicist, the *Times* newspaper. Mr. Forncett was at his gate, with similar intent. A slight altercation between the dogs led to the exchange of a few words, which gradually ripened into a brief conversation.

"I did not call on you, Mr. Forncett, according to country etiquette," said Frowde; "first because I am nobody; next, because I have no time to call on anybody. At the same time,

I am always glad when anybody in a neighbourly way will call on me, especially if they won't grumble when I am too busy to speak. I am a slave of the pen."

"A despotic master," said Forncett. "If I may look in now and then on you and Mrs. Frowde, I shall be glad. My only visitor just now is the Vicar, whom I like very much, and who comes from a good stock: but clergymen are almost as difficult to talk to as ladies—you are afraid of hurting their feelings."

"How ungallant, Mr. Forncett!" said Diana. "But if you can't talk to ladies there must be something intensely wrong about you—radically wrong."

At that moment the lord of the manor drove by a well-appointed four-in-hand, with his wife on the box, and powdered footmen statuesque behind.

"That's Sir Herbert West," said Frowde, "a landlord of the right sort, and a most courteous neighbour."

"I can't see a four-in-hand without a shudder," said Diana; "there was such a crash with one right under our windows when I was in Brighton before Christmas. I hardly knew what happened: it seemed as if everybody would be killed, and the road was so crowded. Nobody was much hurt, I believe, but the driver shot one of the horses that was dreadfully injured. I never felt so faint."

"Whose drag was it?" said Frowde.

"Let me see. Lord Arun's, I think I heard. But he was not driving; it was a Mr. Lifton—Arundel Lifton. I think he is a member of Parliament.

"He is," said Frowde. "Good morning, Mr. Forncett. I must study the *Times*. I hope you will walk across the road when you are in the humour."

"Arundel Lifton," said Forncett to himself, with a darkened face, as he walked down his path. "Why did not that fiend break his neck, and meet his proper punishment?"

Ralph, who opened the door when he saw his master coming, perceived that some bitter thought was troubling him. But it was a secret anguish, far beyond the ken of *fidus Achates*.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEMPLES.

In emerald meadows, slowly-winding streams,
Calm villages where peasants dwell at peace
Around their ancient church,
The quiet heart delights.
But rosy mountain-peaks that pierce the sky,
And cataracts shattered into diamond mist,
And wild wind-tortured woods,
Solace a passionate grief.

MR. TEMPLE was in the habit of making up his mind with promptitude; and, when he learnt from his agent that Mrs. Selfe had altered her determination, he gave instructions that the house should at once be secured. The departure of the old lady caused no particular blank at Copse Hill, where she had no particular intimacies. Her heart was with Garibaldi and Colenso and Voysey, and other notorieties of this irregular sort, to whom, sitting like a sagacious ghost at the writing-table in her bay window, she addressed long letters of advice and consolation. To the world around her she was something impalpable, intangible—a wraith rather than a woman—bloodless as Anacreon's tettix. She walked—especially in uncomfortable weather; she drove; she exchanged formal calls with a few of her duller neighbours; she read the *Daily News* and the *Inquirer*. When she vanished from the scene, the villagers thought no more of it than the melting of a snow-drift. She faded away for the present to Cheltenham, where a great Unitarian logician disproved the divinity of Christ every Sunday to large congregations. One such disproof might be deemed enough, but *Non credo* is as pertinacious as *Credo;* and even the believers in Nihilism can be enthusiasts.

Late in the evening of a February day the Temple family reached their house. Everything was in order, for Mr. Temple had employed first-rate tradespeople, and had sent forward two servants, Belgians, a man and his wife, to arrange the rooms as he liked thme. The ladies were tired, and went to bed early. Mr. Temple sat up, alternately reading and thinking, till his neglected fire warned him to go also. He was wondering whether this last step could be made permanent. In his time he had seen many troubles, scarcely caused by himself—or, if in any degree so caused, entirely

through his spirit of self-sacrifice. Mr. Temple was a stoic: he looked upon himself as a link in the infinite chain of humanity; he thought of himself, not as William Temple, individual and independent, but as a husband, a father, a member of the State, a member of the Church. It was curious that he did not force this view on others: this was due to his belief that few men, and probably no women, are capable of accepting it. Of no man that ever lived could it be more truly said that "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." He would have scorned to mention the deepest imaginable trouble to his dearest friend. He might have taken for motto,

> "Si fractus illabatur orbis,
> Impavidum ferient ruinae."

This stoic had many friends, though strange events had urged him to a quiet life, and he saw them seldom. Once he had been a keen politician, and if he had pursued this career, would certainly have been a Minister. Even now, men of the highest political standing kept him acquainted with that inner current of affairs which does not appear in the journals, and asked his opinion on questions of a difficult character. He never wrote a line for the press; but his suggestions, passed by the Secretary of State through his secretary's secretary to an able editor, often appeared in the epic grandeur of leader type, and prepared honourable members for what they might expect from the Ministry in the course of that night's proceedings. No member of his family guessed at this. He possessed in perfection veracity and secrecy.

When he came down to breakfast next morning he found Kate ready for him, with bright eyes, and rosy cheeks, and rather dishevelled tresses.

"This is a charming place, papa," she said. "I have had Jack out for a scamper through the meadow and orchard, and very nearly got thrown, he is so fresh. I am sure there must be delightful rambles through those woods in the summer. I am afraid mamma does not like it so well: she says the scenery is too tame, and there are too many houses in the neighbourhood."

At this moment entered the lady just named, and, with a smile of melancholy sweetness, took her place at the table. A woman more nobly beautiful than Leonora it would be hard to find. Superb masses of hair as dark as midnight were wound around a stately and statuesque head: her countenance was of the purest Greek type. The natural expression of her

countenance was serious and serene: but there was in her dark eyes a dreamy wistfulness which spoke of suffering.

"Do you think you shall like this, Leonora?" said Mrs. Temple. "It is very quiet.

"I could have wished a lonelier place. And the ground in front are so open to the road. Is it not a pity?"

"Yes," he replied. "The old lady, our predecessor here, was rather a leveller, I am told. She cut down the hedge in front, which was several feet higher. There were some fine old hawthorns in the meadow, but she disestablished them with great energy. However, I shall soon change the aspect of affairs. There is a first-class nursery about eight miles away: I shall ride over this morning and see what the man can do with laurels and hollies. If it does not freeze again just yet, we may shut ourselves in this spring. As to the meadow, I shall throw it into the lawn, and sprinkle it with ornamental shrubs; and in another year the place will look quite different."

"May I ride with you, papa?" asked Kate.

"Can you spare her, Leonora?" said Mr. Temple.

"Oh! yes. I want her to have plenty of exercise. She is just at the age when she ought to be physically active. Girls in their teens often take to brooding and dreaming if they live an indoor life."

"I don't mean to brood and dream, mamma. When I go to bed at night I dream of the morning, and when I say my prayers I pray for a fine day. I hope it's not wrong. The Church prays for fine weather."

"Go and get ready, child, and talk no more nonsense," said Mr. Temple.

Kate hurried off, and Mr. Temple said to Leonora,

"I do hope you will like this place, my darling. I shall not cultivate the neighbours, and they will not trouble us. If you do not like it, we will go elsewhere."

"No, William—no indeed. I want to stay here always. I am tired of wandering. If you like it, I am sure I shall."

"You will like it very much better when I have altered it a little. I will change it as if I had a magic wand. That pond shall be cleaned out, and lined with granite, and we'll have a fountain, and white water-lilies, and gold-fish, and Muscovy ducks. It will amuse you to superintend the alterations."

"I shall hate to go so near the road, William."

"Nonsense, dearest. There is nobody in this quiet corner for you to dread. Be brave, and forget these fancies."

"I will try, dear William."

"That's right. Now mind you eat a good lunch, and take a glass or two of wine. You need it, really."

Mr. Temple and his daughter rode away in the same direction as Mr. Forncett, as already described; but instead of riding off at a tangent across the heath, as he did, they held straight on through a turnpike gate kept by a clever bird-fancier, passed in due time through narrow-streeted Medenhythe, crossed the river, where lay a flotilla of steam-launches, and a few miles further on reached the gardens of which they were in search—gardens not surpassed in England for skilful and liberal management. Mr. Temple soon found all that he wanted, and arranged that the very next day the work should be commenced—always provided a hard frost did not set in.

"You must be famished, Kate," said her father, as he put her in the saddle. "Can you last till we get back to the river? There is a comfortable inn there, and we'll have some lunch."

"Oh, I'm all right, papa. I was so hungry with my ride that I ate half a fowl and such a lot of bacon at breakfast. Poor Lisette, who lives on chocolate, looked quite astonished."

Lisette was a French maid who attended on the ladies, and waited at table at breakfast.

The father and daughter cantered to the riverside inn, where they found eatable cutlets and tolerable wine. Places of very fashionable resort are a good deal spoilt by the miscellaneous character of their customers: nine out of ten are no judges of what is good, and accept without question anything that is expensive. The tenth, who is a judge, simply decides that he will not go there again. When Shenstone sang and Dr. Johnson perorated in praise of inns they had not been demoralized by railways: adulteration had not become a fine art. You could not get an elegant dinner at the old-fashioned English inn, but you could get a thoroughly nutritious one. Where is the modern hotel which will condescend to give you either the one or the other? Yet it is quite easy to combine both.

Shrubs and workmen reached Winterslow in good time next day; and, under Mr. Temple's active directions, there were soon signs of metamorphosis. The village woke up when it beheld the new family in possession, and a regular revolution in progress. The village inn and the village shop were both in a state of excitement. Miss Tattleton almost lost her character for omniscience, because she only knew that the name of

the new-comers was Temple, and had heard from the boy (hired in the neighbourhood) that all the servants were foreigners, except Clope, the coachman, who never spoke except to swear at the aforesaid boy. Inquisitiveness grew furious, and when the village magnates gathered that evening in the bar of the inn to achieve happy stupidity by much beer and tobacco, the huge landlord came down upon the table with a blow of his fist, and expressed his opinion (not without an oath) that people who kept foreigneering servants were no better than they should be. No one contradicted Sir Oracle.

CHAPTER XVII.

PUBLIC OPINION.

I am Sir Oracle;
And, when I ope my lips, let no dog bark.

"HALF-A-POUND o' 'bacca and a penny stamp, please."

"Why, what can you want all that 'bacca for, John?" said Miss Tattleton to her customer, who was the lad engaged to help the coachman at Winterslow; "surely you ain't going to begin smoking, like some of the boys of the village?"

"Be'unt for me: for Mr. Clope," said John, who had a very small vocabulary.

"And does Mr. Clope smoke?"

"I never sees him," said John.

"And how do you like your new place, John?"

John's answer to this was a grin of satisfaction.

"Well, do you like these?" said Miss Tattleton, giving him two big brown lumps of sweetstuff known as "brandy-balls," and which must have had a flavour of tobacco about them, as Miss Tattleton had just previously lifted her hand from the tobacco jar.

"Rather," said John; and he quickly stuffed one into his mouth.

To suck a brandy-ball being to John the height of happiness, he of course favourably regarded the giver of the sweetmeat, and answered her questions to the best of his ability, but felt a little puzzled to know why Miss Tattleton suddenly

took so much interest in him, when she had known him ever since he was born and had not often spoken to him.

"How do you get on with the servants, John?"

"I don't understand they."

"Can't they talk English?" said Miss Tattleton.

"I dunno: they jabbers away so fast I can't tell a word they say; and Mr. Clope, he don't know neither," answered John, who thought he would do his best in the way of a reply.

"And how do you like the master?"

"I loikes him."

"And the missus?"

"I ain't seen her."

"And the young lady?"

"She gave me a big bit of cake."

Nothwithstanding John's anxiety to make himself agreeable in view of future brandy-balls, Miss Tattleton was no wiser at the end of the conversation.

But she thought something might be done with Clope if he could be persuaded to come to the shop; so she sent a message by John that she hoped the tobacco would suit Mr. Clope, and that she had sent the best she had.

John walked out of the shop, and was crossing the green to go up the lane to Winterslow, when he was accosted by Clope.

"Now, then, you young imp, how much longer are you going to be? If this is the way you do messages you ain't worth much. What's kept you so long?"

John had put the other ball into his mouth, as he left the shop, and was now perplexed by four different sensations. There was the pleasure of having a brandy-ball to suck; but then how could he speak with such an angular sweetmeat in his mouth? and what excuse could he make? and wouldn't his master be displeased with him?—for he looked upon Clope as his master.

"Please, sir," he said, the brandy-ball sticking out in his cheek, "she—she—she——"

"Oh, pray don't scold the poor boy!" said Miss Tattleton, in her sweetest manner. She had seen what was going on, and thought this a good opportunity of making Clope's acquaintance. "Pray don't scold him, Mr. Clope; it was my fault he was not quicker. I was telling him I hoped he was a good boy, and did what you told him, and what a lucky boy he is to have such a good place. You see I have known him since he was born, and knew his mother when she was a little girl. I'm quite an old woman, you know."

"Don't you tell me that," said Clope, quite taken by her manner, "you haven't seen the other side of forty yet."

"Ah! haven't I!" she replied; "and something more too. I've seen a good many come and go in that house," pointing to Winterslow, "but I hope we shan't lose you very soon. We want smart young fellows to brighten up the place a bit, and give us a little custom."

Now Miss Tattleton's pleasant manner, mixed up with a little flattery, so far overcame Clope that he made a few visits to her shop, the result of which was that Miss Tattleton learned that Mr. Temple was a quiet gentleman, who was evry particular that everything should be well done; that Mrs. Temple seldom came out, and never went beyond the garden; that Clope thought she must be a second wife, as she looked too young to be Miss Temple's mother; and that Miss Temple was a very nice young lady, and always spoke kindly to the servants.

Clope, on his part, learned a good deal concerning certain of the inhabitants of the village, but the knowledge was not of much use to him, as he scarcely knew anyone by sight. He also found the people at the Pleiades very civil to him, and eager to make his acquaintance. One evening he went in for a glass of beer, when Biggins, in a heavy, good-natured manner said—

"Well, coachman, glad to see you. Come in and sit down a bit, and let me treat you to a pint for a beginning; we always likes to give a welcome to strangers."

"Thank you," said Clope, and he sat down in the bar and looked round to see who were his companions.

"And how do you like these parts, coachman?" said Biggins.

"It looks pretty fair. I shall know better when I've tried," answered Clope.

"Well, here's your good health," said a little sharp man, who was also a coachman, and spoke in a rapid way, with a strong Irish accent. "I hope you'll find your place as good as I find mine. I've got a downright good master, who keeps a hunter for me to ride, and lets me do pretty much as I like. I found the missis rather a tough 'un at first, but I soon came over her; and if I don't turn them out as neat as any gentleman and lady in the county, my name's not Paddy O'Brien."

"Yes, you're in good luck; you know which side your bread is buttered. But I wonder you don't frighten them, driving that brougham at such a pace," said Biggins. "Now,

coachman," he said, "take another pint; it's the first night, and I never charge anything first nights. Perhaps you'll be able to do me a good turn some time or other. I'm a carrier, you know, and bring everything right down from London up to your gate—not like those confounded railways, that leave you to send miles to a station. Come, take another glass."

"Thank you," said Clope, who thought Biggins a jolly good-natured fellow. "I'll give you a turn when I have the chance."

"What I says," said Biggins, "is, let us live and let live. Bless you, I'm willing to serve my neighbours and not make no enemies; but that there fellow over there" (and Biggins swore his usual oath) "must go a-interfering with everyone. Why, I believe if he knew I bought a bird or two from some poor fellow who had picked 'em up when they've been knocked over by the telegrapht wires, he'd have me took up for encouraging poaching. Poaching, indeed! What right has Sir Herbert West or any other man to prevent a poor man from picking up a bird that has been killed by the telegrapht? Or, for the matter of that, why shouldn't a poor man knock down a bird or a hare when he sees one in front of him? D——n the game laws, says I; we want old Garry over here to alter all that."

"I never saw such a crop of turmuts in all my life, only the rabbits got in among 'em," said an old man huddled up in the corner, and who was rather thick in his speech; but nobody took any notice of his remark.

"I don't think Garibaldi could do much with the game laws," said an intelligent-looking young man, who had ambitions that the village could not gratify, and came to the Pleiades for change of scene.

"The question of the game laws is a difficult one," said a middle-aged man, who wore a wig of a colour too dark for his complexion, and who spoke in a dignified and dogmatic manner, as though in the habit of laying down the law. He had altogether the air of being superior to his company, and preferred to drink from a glass instead of a mug. "There is a great deal to be said on both sides."

"If you'd seen that field of turmuts before they rabbits got in," said the old man, taking advantage of a pause.

"Well, you see," said a big old farmer who had a torch of humour in him, disregarding the talker on turmuts, "if the game wasn't preserved there'd be none to knock down."

"Right you are there," said Biggins.

"I must say I like a rabbit—especially when it don't cost anything," said Paddy.

"And a hare's better still," said the intelligent young man.

"Rabbits are very well when they don't eat up all your turmuts. If you'd seen they turmuts, " said the old man.

"You'd better bring us a sample," said Biggins, at which there was a roar of laughter. But the old man shook his head with melancholy wisdom, saying once again—

" You never seen such turmuts, till they darned rabbits got at 'em."

Presently some of the company rose to go, Clope being amongst them. The burly Boniface was very friendly indeed, and seemed loth to let him go.

"All the best company comes here, coachman," he said. "We're a regular club of good fellows every night. Why, there's your butler, Paddy,—if he isn't a gentleman I don't know one; and there's Squire Ashley's footman, he looks in every morning regular."

Thus talking, Biggins showed Clope the way to the door, giving him a friendy nudge at parting, and a pressing invitation to come again soon. But when he returned to his bar, and sat down with heavy emphasis, he grunted out an oath and said—

"I don't think that fellow's good for much, Paddy. A nice lot we're getting about here. Look at that servant of Forncett's, he don't condescend to enter a public, and yet his master can't afford to keep a carriage. The gentry haven't got any money now-a-days, or if they have, they're afraid to spend it. Now, if old Garry was to come over here, we should get our farms without paying any rent, and them lazy baronets and lords would have to work for their living."

A scientific student of enthusiasm might find much matter for thought in the influence which Garibaldi has had on people totally different from each other. Here, with but one house between them, were that refined and thoughtful lady, Mrs. Selfe, and this heavy illiterate landlord, both holding a strange irrational faith in the Italian adventurer. The lady corresponded with his admirers, grew the grapes of Caprera, had on her wall his portrait, with the ridiculous motto, immortalized by Martinus Scriblerus,

"None but himself can be his parrallel."

She had dreams, doubtless, of a universal republic, and a Uni-

tarian Church—of monarchy and superstition wholly abolished, of a quiet, well-ordered, temperate, drab-coloured community: and all through Garibaldi. But the stout landlord, who had inscribed the hero's name in large letters on his favourite furniture-van, dreamt of quite other things. His millennium included the abolition of rent, taxes, policemen, and the game laws—a jolly time, when poaching should be legal, and public-houses always open. How the triumph of Garibaldi could produce two such very different results the lady and the landlord may settle between them.

"I don't think much of the new people we're getting about here," said Biggins, still somewhat irate with Clope, who had not responded to his cordiality with any effusion, being, in fact, one of those people who prudently doubt too gushing a civility. "They're a queer lot, all of them, Paddy, and as stingy as the devil. I don't believe there's a gentleman about here as buys as much good beef and mutton as I do."

"You want a lot," said the lithe Irishman, who was about a third of the massive landlord's weight. "There's no keeping up a fine figure like yours on bacon. I should say, now, you were heavier than Sir Roger."

This was adroit flattery, though it might not appear so to everyone. Strange to say, after Garibaldi, Biggins most revered the "unhappy nobleman" in Dartmoor: it was a proud recollection that he had once been mistaken for him; and Paddy's last remark resulted in his getting a final drop of brandy and water without the ceremony of payment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FIRST LOVE.

The very first
Lip that has slaked its thirst
At virgin spring
As yet unruffled by the wild bird's wing,
The very first
Bold mariner who burst
With shallop free
Into a magic solitary sea.

It was a breezy March day. The fast-budding trees were tossed by an awakening wind. Thrush on tree-summit found it hard to cling and sing, but conquered the difficulty, being strengthened by the ecstasy of vernal love. White violets were covering the banks, and in the meadows grew innumerable daffodils,

> "That come before the swallows dare, and take
> The winds of March with beauty."

On this joyous restless day, Jack Sebright, feeling as restless as the mad March wind, rode over to call on Frowde. As he came along the primrose-yellowed lanes, he sang and shouted. He was in exuberant spirits. He had a presentiment of some happy event. It was one of Frowde's idle mornings, as he knew; and he anticipated a pleasant gossip about things in general and his own uncertain career in particular. He liked to imagine for himself every kind of career that is open to an English gentleman; and there was no one of them which he did not feel disposed to pursue rather than that clerical career on which the Rev. Marston Sebright had set his heart for him.

When he reached Copse Hill he found the Vicar at Frowde's cottage. He came with news that his parishioners, for their own sakes, were sorry to hear. A living a few miles away had been offered him, and he had decided to accept it. The parish was ancient, with a noble church and venerable traditions—the income better, the parsonage larger, which to a clergyman with a growing family is matter of moment. Everybody in Copse Hill was glad for Mr. Bonfellow's sake; and it was pleasant to know that he would still be a near neighbour.

"What a pity you had not made up your mind before now, Mr. Sebright, and taken holy orders! You might have succeeded me, perhaps—and it would have been a good beginning, as you like the place so well. Moreover, you might have persuaded Mr. Frowde to come to church oftener. I cannot get him to come, though I have often tried. He says the church is too hot in summer and too cold in winter. There is an old Act of Parliament, which I believe has never been repealed, which imposes a fine for non-attendance at church. Don't you think you deserve to be fined?" said Mr. Bonfellow, turning to Manly Frowde.

"I would pay the fine right willingly if I were a landed proprietor, or millionnaire, or railway director, or capitalist in any shape. It is the duty of such people to go to church regularly. But you see my brain is my capital, and I am compelled to work on Sundays as well as weekdays, and an hour in an ill-ventilated church would spoil at least one day's work for me. But your conscience may be clear on the matter, Mr. Bonfellow: you have done your duty in exhorting me. Perhaps your successor may be more successful."

"I am sure I hope he may," said Mr. Bonfellow, in a serious kindly way.

"Do you yet know your successor?" asked Manly Frowde.

"Yes, I believe a Mr. Voyd has had the offer. I am not very intimate with him, though he is a curate in the adjoining parish; but he is said to be an orthodox and energetic Churchman. He comes very highly recommended by the bishop of the diocese in which he had a previous cure."

"Is his name Vypar Voyd?" asked Sebright.

"Yes," replied the vicar. "He is at present a curate of Mr. Urgent's at Battlefield, one of whose daughters he married."

"I knew him slightly at Oxford," said Sebright. "He was older than I, but we had some common friends. I should think he would make an admirable clergyman."

"So everyone says," remarked the vicar, "and I am glad to have your independent testimony. I hope Mr. Voyd will make up for my shortcoming."

"Don't be unnecessarily humble," said Frowde. "If your successor surpasses you, he won't make us forget you. You were never meant for the Church, in my opinion, but you do the work better than some of the predestined parsons who were cradled in surplices."

"I don't quite know what I was intended for," said the

vicar, with a good-humoured laugh, "but I think I was put into the Church because I am the fool of the family."

"Nine men out of ten get into the wrong place," said Frowde. "The thing is to stick to your work, whether you like it or not. At the outset of life, if we have free choice, we have not the knowledge to choose aright. Here is Sebright; his father wants him to take orders, and I believe he will make a capital clergyman. A clergyman wants an unshakeable faith in God, and wide sympathy with humanity. My friend Jack has both, or I'm much mistaken."

The Vicar, who was carrying the news of his departure to his parishioners, soon took leave, and Frowde and Sebright started for a stroll.

"It is astonishing how I vacillate," said Sebright. "It is a great thing to be a good clergyman, of course, but there are so many things for which I fancy myself fitter: a soldier, for instance, or a sailor."

"You're too old for the navy, my friend, and neither service is worth anything unless there is war. You were not made to wear a red coat and gold epaulettes."

"Was I meant for a black coat and an M.B. waistcoat?"

"That remains to be seen. At any rate, in the Church you will see active service. I don't think you would do for a doctor or a barrister: your character is too simple for success in a subtle profession. You could not humbug a hypochondriacal patient, or plead with passionate earnestness for a client whom you knew to be guilty. Now simple honesty, which is a disadvantage in many professions and trades, is of real value to a clergyman. I don't say it will make you a bishop."

"Me a bishop!" interrupted Sebright, with a mighty laugh. "Jack Sebright in lawn sleeves and a silk apron! *Nolo episcopari*, thank you, Frowde."

As they talked, they had been slowly ascending Copse Hill, where the path was narrow and steep. Just at this moment they encountered Kate Temple on her pony, picking her way downward. Her bright hair was blown loosely over her blue riding habit; her eyes were full of life and laughter; she was as gay and joyous as the coming spring. Frowde and Sebright both turned round when she had passed—possibly to enjoy the pretty bird's eye view of the village below.

"A pretty little girl, that," said Frowde, when she had reached the road. "She is the daughter of a Mr. Temple, who, you know, has just taken that ugly bay-windowed house

where Mrs. Selfe lived. Don't you think her rather pretty, Jack?"

"She's not very little," said Jack, evading the question.

"Well, I mean she's a mere child—some seventeen or eighteen years old, I should think. She cannot be very old, for her mother, whom I often see in the garden from my bedroom window, does not look more than thirty. I should have supposed she was a step-mother, but that I see a decided likeness. She is a glorious-looking creature."

"Isn't she?" said Jack, abstractedly.

"The mother I mean," said Manly Frowde.

"Yes—es," muttered Jack, in some confusion.

That day as Jack rode home through the Oakshire lanes he felt uneasy, and could not quite tell what was the matter. He slashed fretfully with his riding-whip at the young green shoots of hawthorn in the hedges, and muttered a good deal to himself. His brown mare Bessie once or twice looked round to see what was the matter, when her master made a more than usually vigorous dash at a hawthorn twig. At last she seemed to catch her master's spirit, and became restive too.

"Now, then, Bessie, old girl, steady, steady," he said. "Wonder what her name is?" he muttered. "Be steady, I tell you," he said aloud to Bessie.

Whether Bessie had caught her master's fit of restlessness, or whether she fancied he was not paying her so much attention as usual, and that she would devise some means to attract his notice, it is impossible to say. She had made several mild remonstrances at first by turning her head round to see what was the matter; and at last she became so troublesome that Jack determined to take the nonsense out of her. So he put her at the first practicable fence, and went home across country. He took the nonsense out of his mare, but he did not succeed with himself.

Mrs. Sebright, who was always cheerful, was very inquisitive that evening about Jack's friends at Copse Hill, and Jack was in no mood for answering questions.

"Don't you think, my dear," she said, "that as I am within driving distance, I ought to go and call on your friends, as you have received such hospitality from them? If we put the horses up at Copse Hill for a rest and a feed, we could manage it very well, though the journey there and back would be rather long for them." Mrs. Sebright was always overcareful with her cattle.

"The horses wouldn't hurt," said Jack, impatiently; "but you know I have told you several times that Mr. Frowde does not care for ceremony, and he never calls anywhere. I am sure he'd be delighted to see you if you happened to be passing that way."

"A little observance of ceremony is necessary sometimes," said Mrs. Sebright, rather chidingly—meaning, no doubt, that Jack at that moment was not very ceremonious in his tone to her.

"Eh? what? ceremony? marriage ceremony?" said Mr. Sebright, opening his eyes, after his after-dinner nap. He always tried to persuade himself that he did not go to sleep after dinner, but simply closed his eyes to rest them. He would generally catch up the end of a sentence as he woke, to show that he had been listening.

"Are you talking of the marriage ceremony, Jack?" he said; "why, it's no good for you to think of a wife till you've found something to do."

"No, father, said Jack, laughing, though marriage seemed certainly the best form of ceremony to Jack at that moment; "no, I was saying that Mr. Frowde won't mind your not calling on him, as he doesn't stand on ceremony."

"Oh, ah!" said Mr. Sebright, "Frowde, ah! clever man! should like to meet him some day. Good scholar! done a great deal for the Church in his time."

"Why, father, Mr. Bonfellow, the vicar of Copse Hill, was saying he never could get him to go to church."

"Very likely, my boy, very likely: these men are often odd in their habits. But I should like to see him, for all that."

When Jack went to bed that night he could not sleep—a most unusual thing for him. He tossed about, and threw off some of the bed-clothes, declaring they had made his bed warmer than usual; then he walked up and down the room; then he tried to read. He felt so feverish that he dipped his head in cold water: then he took a saline draught.

But there is one fever which cold water and saline draughts will not cure: and Jack was now realizing this—the Fever of Love.

CHAPTER XIX.

JEST OR EARNEST?

False words in jest are spoken,
And hearts are thereby broken:
Ah me! it is a token
That Love hath bitter times!
Ay, but pure Love's strong splendour,
Its utter soul-surrender,
Eyes true 'neath eyelids tender,
Shall live in loyal rhymes.

VALENTINE LORD ARUN maintained his pursuit of Flora Trevor with gallant pertinacity. He did not know what to make of the dainty coquette, whose nature was as changeable as an April day. Arun had never learned to make up his mind about anything. His intellect was discontinuous, and moved by impulse: for this reason all attempts to give him an education up to the average had wholly failed. His tutors, though baffled, could never lose temper with him, his natural good-humour being inexhaustible. He was the first to laugh at his own incapacity. He could not spell. He could not add up a column of figures accurately. He never travelled much beyond the verb *Amo* in Latin. French he liked, and read Paul de Kock and Alfred de Musset: moreover, in English literature he read comedies of the Caroline school, Etherege and Farquhar and Wycherley; also he read *Don Juan.* And though his talk was disconnected, he wrote a pleasant letter—misspelt and almost illegible, yet with a vein of humorous gossip. Indeed, though his mere acquaintance would not have believed it, a few of his friends were aware that he had a knack at rhyme, and could hit off an epigram or any such trivial matter with happy effect. Arundel Lifton was in the habit of advising him to marry a clever woman, and get her to educate him. Val, who preferred pretty women to clever ones, showed no sign of taking this advice.

The game of caprice and coquetry was pleasantly enough played between Lord Arun and the fair Flora for a month or two at Brighton. Lifton was an apparently disinterested spectator. He chaffed his cousin mildly when they came together, and rallied him on taking so long a time to win a widow. Indeed, Flora was, in Lord Arun's own opinion,

rather difficult. She would be all sweetness at night—all indifference in the morning. Sometimes he seemed to look through her blue eyes into her very heart; sometimes her reckless manner appeared to show that in moulding her fairy form the heart had been omitted. Did she know anything about it herself? It was doubtful.

On a windy March morning, with occasional bursts of rain from the east, Mrs. Trevor, in a waterproof wrapper, was standing at the seaward end of the West Pier. She looked out at the wild waste of shuddering sea, over which the lights and shadows chased each other in swift career. She was the only person on the pier. Very few indeed were on the unparalleled promenade of our English Baiae; for when rainy squalls from the east come down upon Brighton no umbrella will last an instant, and you are wet through almost before you know it is raining. Flora looked over the sea—a little sadly. Her gay and reckless temper was not long to be subdued: but if your brain is as light as a dove's feather, and the blood in your heart as effervescent as champagne, you must needs be serious now and then. Yes, Flora was serious. She thought to herself,

"We have been playing fast and loose, and now it is over. We have been flirting gaily under the eyes of that fiend, Arundel. He means me mischief, I know. He would like me to bring Valentine to the point, and accept him, and then crush me. I will not be crushed, strong and cruel as he is. No; I will tell Valentine to leave me."

"I must. If he knew all he would scorn me. It is hard, hard, hard! I think I love him as well as ever I could love any man. Shame that it was—to marry me when I was a baby to that cold austere man, who has spoilt my life! Oh! if I had known anyone like Valentine then! And yet he thought he did his duty by me. Duty! I hate the word. However, I must do mine—and here comes Val."

She had heard Lord Arun's quickly approaching step. He came quite gaily through wind and rain, defiant of both in his blue pilot-coat with yacht-club buttons. He held out his hand to her gaily, and said—

"Capital weather, Flora, eh? Fools stay indoors by the fire, and wait for the wind to stop. You're—by Jove, you know—just like a—what is it?—mermaid?—no, they're half fishes, ain't they?"

"A charming compliment, Val," she said, "I'm not a mer-

maid, sir. Well, have you and your black-looking cousin decided when you go to London?"

"Yes—have we?—oh, yes, we drive up to-morrow. Arundel hates railways—he's got so many shares. Yes—by Jove—to-morrow—unless——"

"Unless what?" she said, laughing.

"Oh, you know, Flora. Don't you see, when a fellow—you know the sort I mean—has a lot to say and it breaks into bits like thin ice when you're skating, you know—any other fellow, lady I mean—might help him out, by Jove."

"Out of the water when the ice breaks, you mean? Well, Val, you've broken the ice. I'll be frank with you: I am not good enough for you."

"Oh! I say—by Jove!" he interposed.

"True," she said, with a pretty little sigh. "I don't say I'm very wicked, but I'm not good enough to be Lady Arun."

"Confound it, now!"

"Confound it, by all means. I don't say I never shall be good enough. If I am, I'll tell you so frankly. Come, Val, don't be cut up. We've had a happy time: don't let us end it miserably. You go to London, and make speeches in the House of Lords."

"Hang the House of Lords! I should make a speech like—like a dying rushlight. 'Twon't do, Flora. I should say—'Well, my lords, look here, you know—it mayn't be the question before the House, but I'm in love, don't you see—and the lady won't have me, and won't say why—so I vote she's committed for contempt of court, and I'm committed along with her.'"

Flora laughed gaily.

"I shall read that speech in the *Galignani*, no doubt, and there will be an article in the *Débats* on it, to show that English wit is inferior to French."

"*Galignani?*" he said.

"Yes, I am going to Paris for a week too. Don't look pathetic: I won't forget you. We will be good friends, whatever happens: perhaps we may be better friends some day. But we must wait, Val. And remember how young you are: you may see somebody delightfully beautiful, of your own rank, that will make you forget poor little me."

"Never!" he said, squeezing her little rosy leaflet of a hand, and looking earnestly into those capricious eyes.

"Oh! I know you are as true as steel," she said. "If we are meant to meet again, the way will be cleared. Now let us part. Shall I write to you from Paris?"

"Oh, by Jove, yes!—*please*, Flora. Arun House, Park Lane, don't you know? Too big a place, by Jove! for a bachelor. There's Arundel—a dozen times as rich as I—lives in a cosy corner in the Albany—snug as a squirrel in an old rotten tree. Wish he'd change."

Lord Arun and Mrs. Trevor walked to the gates of the pier together, and there parted. Neither was quite satisfied. Flora—but for one imminent, perhaps inevitable, danger—might at once be Lady Arun. She liked both Arun and his title. As to him, he was very decidedly in love, but had not resolve enough to break down all barriers, and force the lady to a confession. He saw in Flora a creature very different from what she really was, and he, of course, believed in the perfect innocence and purity of his own creation.

In the course of the day he sought Lifton, to arrange about the journey to London.

Arundel Lifton was in one of his least amiable moods. He had been watching the flirtation between Lord Arun and Mrs. Trevor, and thought it went on too slowly. There was a point at which he meant to intervene—not precisely like the Queen's Proctor—and that point they seemed to take a long time to reach. He felt himself in the position of a man who waits for the *dénouement* of a comedy which declines to arrive.

"Yes," he said, in reply to Lord Arun's inquiry; "I have ordered horses on. We'll drive four-in-hand all the way. I'm tired of Brighton, Val, but I hate the idea of London. Of course, you'd never tire of Brighton, with that little widow here. Have you made up your mind about her?"

"She's going to Paris," said Lord Arun.

"And a very good place for her," quoth Lifton. "She's quite the Palais Royal style. Do you like her very much, Val?"

"I—'pon honour, you know—never saw anybody I could like half—pooh! a thousandth as much."

"Val," said Lifton, "although you're a peer of the realm, you're a young muff. Be logical. Mrs. Trevor is—heaven knows whom. She confesses herself a widow. She is some years older than you. She wanders from place to place without any definite abode. Why can't you think of Sarum's daughter? She'll be a peeress in her own right, and have all

the Sarum estates, and she's very pretty and very clever. I believe she likes you a little. Don't let that flirting little widow entrap you into something foolish."

"She's—by Jove!—the best little woman in the world!" said Arun vehemently.

"All right, my dear boy," said Lifton. "You will know women better when you are a few years older. Whether you will be glad to have obtained that knowledge I cannot say. I have not been much delighted at what I have learnt."

"Oh, that be hanged!" exclaimed Arun. "By Jove, you know, a world without women wouldn't do. It would be like—like a cigar-case without weeds, don't you see? And as to widows—I say, Arundel, couldn't we have an Act to make their first marriage null and void, don't they call it?"

"I should think the death of the husband sufficed for that," said Lifton. "Come, Arun, forget your widow. Let her go to Paris first, and the mischief afterwards. What *can* it matter? There are both widows and maidens ready to snap at your coronet, with its appendages of coin. Forget your Flora."

"Never!" said Arun, "never!"—which is exactly what Arundel Lifton wanted him to say.

CHAPTER XX.

FORNCETT'S DEN.

O that I had the wings of a dove!—DAVID, *Rex*.

Give me again my hollow tree,
A crust of bread, and liberty!—POPE, *Poëta*.

MAN has many affinities with the world, which was created to give him enjoyment and suffering, to give him the development designed to result in completion elsewhere. The world is full of life and meaning: not a flower or insect but has its special service to render to the Lord of Earth, the creature made in the Creator's image, the heir of a universe. The infinite possibility of sin, which causes the weak to shudder at the imaginable degradation of the race, is more than balanced by an infinite possibility of virtue. More than balanced, we maintain—since strength is greater than weak-

ness, as God is greater than Satan: and one Carlyle or Ruskin rescues humanity from the shame of having produced a hundred Napoleons or Ortons. One ruddy rose compensates a thousand weeds: one dog, all friendliness and daring, makes you pardon efts and frogs and slugs for existing. May not the race of man be similarly estimated?

Most of us have felt the royal poet's desire to take swift wings and fly to some inaccessible solitude, nearer to the Deity—far beyond the reach of the crowd's turmoil. As the carrier pigeons career around the gables of this cottage, as the tumblers rise into ether for the sake of suddenly dropping into the depth, who would not be emulous of them? But the agile and unprisonable spirit of man can climb the silver stair of air to divine heights, where wings could not float. Hence, when the babble of life is most childish, the imagination can seek a quiet home, irradiated by the central light.

Alas! one's imagination is not always in good working order: then a man may be forgiven for desiring tangible wings—wings strong enough to overcome the power of gravitation, and to land one on some pure peak untrodden except by voyaging angels. On the other hand, there is sometimes a just opposite desire—a longing to imitate the squirrel with his store of nuts and acorns in his hollow tree, to hibernate in a library corner with store of books, and pens and ink, and wine—there to "chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancies." A strange delight lurks in such a solitude. The world's vain outcry is unheard. You read no newspapers or maudlin magazines. Ancient poetry and philosophy surround you. If the world is inventing a new religion or making a new war it matters not to you. The hours pass in reverie: essay or poem may perchance grow slowly beneath your pen. In such solitude it is easier than elsewhere to attack some philosophic problem which baffled Pythagoras, or to conjure bright-haired Apollo from his home at Delos, and steal his music for some lovely myth. Goddesses flutter through the student's lonely chamber, and the odour of immortal amaranth floats on the air.

Both these antagonist moods did Frank Forncett love to gratify. He had wandered far and wide; he thought that he should wander no longer. When a wild mood seized him, Ralph saddled Grum, and away he flew for a good gallop. This satisfied him for awhile: now he could retreat to his chimney-corner, read, and write margin-notes in his favourite books—dream the dreams of a man whose youth-vision of life

has departed long ago, fading like a rainbow into a watery sky. Frank Forncett, having decided that he had no future, claimed a right to use the present in his own way for his own delight.

Although upon the high road, Forncett's new demesne was snugly fenced. Evergreens grew thickly, screening him when he chose to stroll along a path which ran round his lawn. At the back also he was beyond inquisitive eyesight: the gardens and green-houses had a pleasant privacy, though you could see from them across miles of meadow and wheat-field. It was the very place wherein a country mouse might vegetate.

Now Mr. Temple's place, just opposite, had been thrown more open to the road than ever before by the destructive Mrs. Selfe, and was noticeable by Forncett as he strolled up and down, well screened by his Portugal laurels. He saw its calm and dignified master ride out in the forenoon, sometimes with his daughter as companion. He watched Kate Temple, a pretty wilful thing, flying about the garden, or riding her pony in the orchard, or tripping across the road to post letters at Miss Tattleton's. Kate Temple was a pleasant study to Forncett. The easy ways of an unconscious girl have a magical charm. This child, with heart untouched, with "life in every limb," with eyes like Sakhrat, that gives the sky its colour (wondrous old myth!) was a delight to look upon. In her, as Wordswroth wrote, Nature had trained a lady of her own. She was in all things simple as a rivulet, natural as a sunbeam. Forncett, who loved all beautiful beings, watched her delightedly, himself unseen.

Of the third occupant of Winterslow his glimpses were rare and remote. The tall dark lady never left the grounds: she passed swiftly from the front garden to the higher grounds above, and was especially fond of a little wood whence she could see for miles across the country. Forncett, who loved the study of mysteries, wondered why she thus secluded herself: and his interest in the question was intensified by the fact that her figure and walk seemed to remind him of some one —well, there is always *some one* to every man.

Frank Forncett was a casuist. He had decided that, as the screen of Portugal laurels had been planted by some former dweller in his house, he had a perfect right to use it for watching the village. So he looked at the passers-by with a clear conscience. None of them interested him enough to make him doubtful of the morality of his position. He liked to see Kate cantering her pony; he liked to see the farmers

pass to market; he liked all forms of life on the highway. But, when he looked at the elder lady of Winterslow, shyly crossing the garden to reach the upper solitude she loved, there was something in her walk that seemed familiar to him. A good field-glass lay on his table: in a moment he could tell whether she was, as he fancied strangely, some one whom he knew, or ought to know; but he could not decide in his mind that it was right to use that glass. Had his naked eye told him who the lady was, there would have been no harm; but to level a field glass at her, and bring her simulacrum close to him, when she evidently desired concealment, seemed to him dishonourable. There was the glass on the table; there, gazing eastward on the reflection of a superb sunset, stood the lady, at the entrance to the wood. It was in his power at once to solve the painful problem, to ascertain whether she was in any way known to him. But he decided that he would not do it.

Men like Frank Forncett, lovers of travel and of solitude, are always superstitious. All men of genius are superstitious, in the true meaning of that much-warped word. Forncett had surely as good a right to a demon as Socrates himself: and he began to believe that his demon had led him to Copse Hill with intent to solve the mystery of his life. That solution seemed to him imminent. But he would not hurry it, even by lifting a field-glass to his eye. He would not ask a question. He would wait. When you have got a downright perplexity, that has lasted from youth upward, you are loth to part with it. Your old enemy, by long acquaintanceship, becomes a friend. A man who has nursed a mystery or an agony for a score of years feels that he would not be the same without it. The inference is that such matters are best left alone. Take the world easily.

Precisely. Frank Forncett had resolved to take the world easily. Here he was, in his hollow tree, with a fine store of books to read and of wine to drink. What more could he want? Yet his favourite volumes lay untouched, and his dinner was sometimes unenjoyed, because he could not decide that he had a right to point his field-glass at a certain lady who wandered in the opposite grounds, and whose movements, as she wandered, brought back to him strange memories of a time of wild delight followed by bitter regret.

CHAPTER XXI.

APRIL FOOLS.

Beauty grows lovelier and youth more flighty
In April, month of flowers and Aphrodite.

JACK SEBRIGHT did not get over his sudden restlessness. He had now a double difficulty in his life. Hitherto his mind had been much perplexed by the problem of his career. *Could* he become a clergyman, uncertain as he felt of his own fitness, unsettled as to his orthodoxy, and perceiving that many great lights of the Church were decidedly dishonest? This question occupied him perpetually: for he had a loving wish to gratify his father, and he sometimes fancied that his scruples must be the result of wrongheadedness or stupidity.

Poor Jack! As if this trouble were not enough for him, he had felt something like a sudden electric shock, which had made the blood tingle in all his arteries—which had made his nerves tremulous as an Æolian harp wind-smitten. He could not understand it. He had known heaps of girls—very charming girls; notably Diana and Claudia. He delighted in their company, but it was not a painful delight, a pleasure touched with fear. Now, suddenly and strangely, one glimpse of a girl who was probably much like other girls seemed to have stung him through. What could it mean?

"Poison they said it was. I too have drunk of it,
This is the passionate poison of love,"

says the pale Pachinitzka in one of Lord Lytton's Servian songs. Jack Sebright had no kind adviser to explain this to him.

Those who know best the magical impulse of love will see most clearly how Jack Sebright, a pure and thoughtless young fellow, might be stricken with the malady without knowing quite what it meant. He connected it with Kate Temple, of course; he could not well help that, for the permanent notion in his head was a desire to see her gay young beauty again. Next morning, after breakfast, he wandered away upon the moorland, gay with the yellow furze which always blooms when kissing is in season. He walked a mile or two into the most solitary part; then, at a spot where one silver-rinded birch hung its leafless boughs over a clear spring,

he threw his massive young limbs on the grass, and tried hard to think out his position.

Had he been a poet, a philosopher, or a man of the world, it is easy to see how the reverie would have ended: either would have satisfied himself, with the help of a lyric, an apophthegm, or a cigar, that he was worthy to win any lady in the world. Jack, being neither of these, but only a healthy boy, slow of growth, without experience and without conceit, was unable to deal with his difficulty in this prompt pleasant way. Plays and romances were to him mere rubbish, so that he had not discovered the tremendous force of sexual magnetism. He had not, to use Clough's phrase, "studied the question of sex." He had regarded girls as sisters and playmates—creatures to be looked on with admiration and treated tenderly. It was not so very long since he had been skating with Diana and Claudia in mere gaiety of heart; and now just one glimpe of a girl unknown to him had awakened an unconquerable tumult in his soul.

There was music all around to calm his purturbed spirit. A light wind rustled the birch boughs. The slight overflow of the spring tinkled over the stones in its runnel. A lark showered down his sparkling silver melody. A daring bullfinch, perched on the very summit of a tall rose-brier amid the furze, poured out his voluble flutings. These things soothed the young fellow somewhat, and a pleasant vision came to him of Kate Temple, as he had seen her but yesterday, a new Aphrodite, brighter and daintier than the old—being born of the air instead of the sea. His manhood stirred within him; he felt that there was a new glory in life—an aim that made nobler all other aims. He could not have put into any words the thoughts which coursed through him in that hour of solitude; only it seemed that the music of the lark and bullfinch, tree and rivulet, blended into the song of a divine young voice—a voice he had never heard. Was he right, I wonder? Was Kate Temple singing, light of heart—and had the magic music power to reach his ear?

Any way, Jack Sebright picked himself up like a giant refreshed, and strode away across the heath singing—very much out of tune—some college song about the university boat-race, quite unsuitable to the fair theme of his thought. But he felt he must make a noise of some sort, and so he startled the solitude with a pæan of victory sung at "wines" when the Dark Blue had been foremost.

Well, the next day, which chanced to be the first of April,

our young friend thought it would be good for his mare and himself that he should have another ride. I fear he made an April fool of his venerated mother by saying that he had not quite decided which way he should take.

"You should not call to see Mr. Frowde too often," said Mrs. Sebright. "A gentleman so much engaged as he is cannot afford to waste time upon idle visitors. And you really should not miss your lunch so often, my dear boy: you require nutritious and regular food."

"I always can get bread and cheese and ale at a wayside inn," replied Jack.

"But you said the ale about here was so very bad," she remonstrated. "Hadn't you better take some sandwiches and a flask of sherry?"

On this precaution, indeed, Mrs. Sebright insisted—having a deep conviction that Jack was delicate, though he was sound as a roach and hard as nails. After all, even the most Herculean youngster that ever breathed need not be ashamed of the coddling of a too-apprehensive mother. Young fellows who are apt to neglect their mothers should be set to read the immortal apotheosis of motherhood in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.

So Jack Sebright, armed with sandwich-box and sherry-flask, armed also with the magic power of a new-born love, started forth on Bessie in gayer spirits than those of yesterday. Although he professed uncertainty as to his intentions, either Bessie or he showed great decision of purpose, and Copse Hill was reached by the shortest possible route. He apologized much to Frowde for looking him up again so soon; but the fine weather had tempted him to ride, and he thought the road to Copse Hill the pleasantest in the neighbourhood.

"Always glad to see you," said Frowde. "When I'm busy I shall say so, and you can talk to the missus, if she isn't busy also, or you can take a book, and stroll about the lawn and read. As to what you say about the road, there is this question: how far does your idea of the beauty of a road depend on what you expect at the end of it?"

"I expected some wise talk, and I have got it already," quoth Jack, with unusual readiness.

"Wise talk by itself is like the apples of the Dead Sea," said the other. "And I don't think you particularly want to be talked to just now. You want to think for yourself, slowly. The soul should move like a star, unhasting, unresting. Be in no hurry with the problems of life, Sebright."

Jack hardly knew whether or not his friendly adviser had found out the new problem which perplexed him. There was a tone in Frowde's voice which seemed significant. After all, his friend perhaps was only thinking of Jack's difficulty about his career.

He made no reply.

"Our gay friends Diana and Claudia are coming for a week at Easter," resumed Frowde. "You must ride over and help us to entertain them. You, as a possible parson, doubtless know that Easter will be here in ten or twelve days."

"I shall be delighted to come," said Jack. "The Miss Selfes are most charming young ladies."

Frowde and his friend were at the gate, close to the high road. They looked round at the sound of horses' hoofs. Mr. Temple and his daughter rode by homewards, exchanging bows with Frowde: and Jack Sebright caught one gay bright glance from Kate, which, like a flash of lightning, shot through his eyes to the inner citadel of his soul. Some moments passed before he could hear what Frowde was saying.

"You should have been here yesterday. You missed a chance. I made acquaintance with Mr. and Miss Temple. She is very charming, though you did not seem to think much of her when we saw her the other day."

Jack inwardly execrated.

"She ran all over the lawn here, like the pretty gay child she is, and sang scraps of song as spontaneously as the skylark sings."

Jack thought of the magic music on the moor yesterday, and wondered whether it could have been the remote echo of Kate Temple's voice.

"I must start now," he said abruptly, looking at his watch. "I promised to be home early."

"Remember Easter," said Frowde. "You must not disappoint Diana and Claudia. And I daresay we shall see a good deal of the Temples. But come over here whenever you have time."

Jack rode away, rapidly at first, but slowly enough when he got into the green soft solitary lanes. The light of Kate Temple's eyes had struck him like a sun-shaft, and he was glad to dream of her alone.

"Lucky for that boy," said Frowde to his wife, as he entered his book-room and sat down in the bay-window to

work, "that he has fallen in love. It will simplify his previous difficulties."

"We must give him every chance at Easter," she said. "I like him."

This couple thought so much together that they required few words.

Kate Temple had *seen* Jack Sebright when that glance of hers caught him. Hardly had she noted him when riding down Copse Hill two days before. Now she had a picture of him—strong, stalwart, fresh, boyish, eager—the youthful making of a knightly man. Kate had never thought much about men, except her father, whom she idolised; she was too healthy to have a pet parson; she had been too wisely and kindly taught by Mr. Temple to fall into romantic silliness of any sort. When she jumped from her pony at the hall door of Winterslow she said,

"Papa, did you notice that young man with Mr. Frowde at his gate?"

"I just caught sight of him. A fine young fellow, rather."

"I thought he looked so boyish and simple for his age," said Kate; "very much as if he had not made up his mind as to the sort of world he had come into."

Mr. Temple laughed, as he often had to laugh at Kate's off-hand judgment of people. She was commonly right. That bright eye of hers did her good service.

"We will talk him over by-and-by," he said. "Find mamma. I want her to see the new fountain play, that we may decide about its height."

The beautiful dark-haired lover of silence and solitude was dreaming over one of Shakespeare's saddest plays when Kate summoned her with a loving kiss, lovingly returned. She came out reluctantly.

"Leonora," said Mr. Temple, "come down—the grass is not damp—and see the fountain play. I want your idea as to the height the water should go to look well from the house, without injuring the lilies or disturbing the gold-fish. You are so good a judge of those things."

She came reluctantly, for she hated being near the high-road, shrinking from the gaze of strangers. She gave her advice, and it was taken. Then, as soon as possible, she walked away across the lawn, taking Kate's hand in hers, and swinging it to and fro.

"Mamma, you are better to-day," said Kate.

"I am quietly happy, my child," she replied, and kissed her.

Frank Forncett, down behind that screen of Portugal laurels, had been looking on all this time. He had not previously been so close to the lady who troubled him with the ghost of a mysterious memory. Now an idea occurred to him which seemed impossible. As she stood by the margin of that pond, watching the fountain experiment with half concealed indifference—as she took Kate's hand in hers, swinging it gaily as they went briskly up the slope—as she stooped to kiss her, like a goddess in the movement—Forncett was more and more convinced, more and more puzzled.

He walked out into the road. She had gone. He strolled downward, and met Frowde, with a huge bundle of letters, going to the post. They exchanged a few words, about nothing in particular. Then Forncett said,

"Our neighbours at that bay-windowed house—do you know their names?"

"Temple," said Frowde.

"*Temple!* Do you know what the family is?"

"Mr., Mrs., and Miss Temple," said Frowde, "and very nice people they seem to be."

"And you are sure one of the ladies is Mrs. Temple?"

"I see no reason to doubt it," said Frowde. "Her daughter is a charmingly fresh little girl. Forgive me—here is the postman: and I have a lot of foreign stamps to get."

Frank Forncett walked back to his own house, and Ralph opened the door to him, seeing him from that sanctum which commanded a view of the front gate.

"Ralph," he said, "do you know anything about those people at Winterslow?"

"Name's Temple, your honour."

"Yes, so I hear. What's their relation? Husband and wife, brother and sister, or what? Find that out for me, if you can."

"If I can!" quoth Ralph, disdainfully. "I'll find out anything your honour wants, if I've to climb Mont Blanc or go down Vesuvius. I'll inquire at once."

And away went Ralph, whispering thus to himself:

"Now what's the matter with the master? He never cared to know who's who before. Please God he isn't in love with either of them. I don't want a woman to manage. He's trouble enough."

And Frank Forncett was saying to himself: "It must be

she. No other woman ever had that walk of dignity and grace. How is she here? What means the adoption of the name of Temple? Who is the man? And is the girl her daughter? I must know, for I'll swear she is Leonora."

CHAPTER XXII.

SHOOLING.

Qui dies mensem Veneris marinæ
Findit Aprilem.

EASTER fell about the Ides of April. Diana and Claudia were to spend it at Copse Hill, taking a pleasant round from place to place, as they travelled. This custom is known as "shooling" in the North Country. The phrase is used by sailors for getting into shallow water when the shore slopes safely and by degrees. The sisters did their shooling in a wise and enjoyable way: their pony Rough took them very comfortably from place to place in a vehicle which may perhaps be described as a lady's dog-cart. They were as independent in their movements as Arundel Lifton in his four-in-hand—possibly safer, though there is a rumour that Claudia once let Rough down when reading a letter of extreme interest. From whom? I wonder.

What a delicious April morning it was! Only a few white feathery clouds floated above the round tower of Avonside Castle, which rises in historic grandeur opposite the quaint farm-cottage that has been nick-named the Doll's House. All the rest of the sky is blue, and a myriad martlets, "oiseaux de retour," are eddying high in air. Diana and Claudia, agile and succinct, with their pretty heads full of adventure impossible, bade farewell to servitor and servitress, and to Rory, the cleverest and most amiable of collies, and gave Rough his head. That sagacious pony, who had heard the gay chatter and rippling laughter of his young mistresses, knew well that there was something up. He was not going to the railway-station this time, he knew. He shook his head wisely and trotted merrily, and made light of the roads, which were clogged with clay that a tropical sun could scarcely dry.

As we watch these daring damsels starting to "shool," we cannot help wishing them some lively adventures. Highwaymen are extinct—so are knights errant; so are troubadours

Diana and Claudia both had courage enough to dance a minuet with Claud du Val. That most chivalrous of thieves has been hanged long ago; and, although the Premier maintains that "adventures are to the adventurous," we doubt whether Don Quixote himself could find much adventure on our well-policed English roads. When it does come, it is of too vulgar a sort to be pleasant.

To walk through England is delightful: the man who can take a month to do his devious twenty miles a-day will get more enjoyment than the traveller who rushes to look for Prester John and the Troglodytes during his brief holiday. Eagerness to traverse great distances and see strange places is a symptom of that anxiety to escape from oneself—the inseparable companion one most hates—which Lucretius describes. The pessimist must, logically, hate himself, and wish himself at—say Jericho: but no, Jericho is the City of Flowers, and your pessimist is a weed—mind and matter out of their place. We, being optimist, believe in ourself, and believe that there is no place like England for travel.

From Doll's House to Copse Hill is seventy miles, and Rough promised to do it in three days. The first day was uneventful. The weather was charming: they found a tolerable village inn at night, with the customary refreshment of eggs and bacon; and there were some ancient volumes of novels in the rather stuffy parlour, with which they read themselves into a somnolent state. Now and then they burst into laughter as some scene more tenderly or terrifically ridiculous than usual turned up: and then they commonly exchanged volumes, and mixed their tales; so that, as Claudia remarked, it was sometimes impossible to know what finally happened. Diana, who has a knack at epigram, pencilled on a flyleaf—

> "Thanks, volumes dear to servant girls,
> To ease their brains and twist their curls,
> You've given us an hour of laughter—
> I hope no hideous dreams hereafter.
> Of you we don't at all complain:
> You sell small beer, and not champagne.
> When Ouida, wonder of her sex,
> Declares her tap is Treble X—
> When flighty Broughton, flavorous Braddon . . ."

At this moment, while Diana was deciding whether *gladden*, *sadden*, or *madden*, was the proper rhyme, in came the servant with bed-room candles. Diana shut the book suddenly, and

made an awful smudge. But her inestimable autograph poem, though blurred and unfinished, remains; and many a wayfarer, solacing himself with bread and cheese and beer and books at the sign of the Hog and Nutcrackers, will wish that he could see more of the works of so charming a poetess.

To-morrow morning. Eggs and bacon again. Such food becomes monotonous. On, therefore—with certainty that, if it be eggs and bacan all this day also, the next will bring Copse Hill and rumpsteak,—possibly oysters. The sisters pass through the loveliest city in the world: even Ro[illegible] feels poetical as he sees the wondrous towers and spires ur[illegible]ragoned, and climbs

"The streamlike windings of the glorious street."

But here they stay not. They have heard of a fascinating wayside inn, four or five miles on, which has a quaint, courteous landlord, a comely and homely landlady, and something to eat beyond the product of the pullet and the pig. Onward they fare, joyously and hungrily (let us not say thirstily, lest we libel ladies), and are thinking how jolly it will be, when all at once capricious April comes down with a sudden windy deluge of rain that so astonishes Rough as to make him pull up short.

"This is a judgment on you, Di," said Claudia, "for writing rubbish in that poor man's book. We can't stop there again."

"We won't stop here, at any rate," said Diana, flagellating Rough, who had made up his mind that the flood had come a second time, and that the best thing was to stand still and bear it.

The drenched damsels reached the Courtenay Arms at last; —such a poetic hostelry; an active ostler of evident Irish descent, who understood Rough's idiosyncrasy at a glance; a ruddy landlord, who took a fatherly interest in the young ladies, and brought them at once into a room where a grand fire was burning, as if expectant of two girls who wanted to be dried; best of all, the kindliest and most humurous of landladies, a little woman in old-fashioned costume, who made them change their clothes with a pleasant despotism, and asked them what they would like for dinner.

"Anything but eggs and bacon," said Claudia promptly.

"Eggs and bacon are very nice," said the little old landlady, "supposing the eggs to be well-fed and fresh, and the bacon also well-fed and toasted to a turn. But we can give you something nicer than that. My master was thinking that

a trout and a veal cutlet or so and a couple of roast pigeons might suit two young ladies on their travels; and I've got store of jelly and marmalade and other nice things—my own making, every one of them—that you'll like for dessert."

"We're in clover," said Diana, when the landlady had left. "We shall have to stop here again. I only hope they won't charge us immense prices for this fairy-like dinner. Only fancy, Claudia—trout! after that everlasting bacon and eggs."

"Yes; and marmalade! I do hope it's quince marmalade, made from their own trees. It must be, for the old lady has quite a fruity look about her. I declare I'm very hungry."

The dinner did not disappoint them. The trout was delicious; the pigeons were perfect; the marmalade was quince of Oxfordshire, not orange of Seville. They had as handmaid a bright-eyed neat-handed Phillis, who stared much at them when she got an opportunity, without, as she imagined, being found out. But there were a couple of old mirrors in the room, and, as she knew nothing about angles of incidence and reflection, they caught sight of her wide mouth and perplexed eyes at intervals, and laughed quietly. And when dessert was on the table—delectable home-made cakes and delicacies—the landlord appeared, and hoped they had dined well, and asked if they would like a glass of perry, made by a brother of his in Herefordshire.

"It isn't champagne, ladies, you know—but I like it better; and the young sparks from college, they like it better; and I don't see why a good English pear shouldn't give as fine a drink as a foreigneering grape."

With which prologue he opened the sparkling fluid; and Diana and Claudia enjoyed the same beverage which delighted Coningsby and Sidonia in merry Sherwood. Certes, perry is a glorious drink, and I am surprised that Englishmen, who will swallow hideous nastiness because it is labelled champagne, will not touch the wines made from native fruits. Happy is that man who can enjoy good cider.

The Courtenay Arms gave our shoolers a cup of tea. Then, as they sat by the welcome fire, wondering what weather it would be to-morrow, Claudia said,

"I am willing to bet there is not a novel in this hostelry."

"I should think not," replied Diana. "I wonder what there is. Heighho! I am too lazy to look."

She leant back in her chair, her bright hair rippling over fair shoulders, and looked a picture of laziness. Dark-haired

Claudia was quite as bad. They did not hunt for books that night.

The fire burned warm and red, enjoyable in a damp midnight of April. Diana and Claudia were in happy reverie, now and then broken by a word or two of chat. At length one said,

"Let's go to bed."

And the other replied,

"Let's——"

At that very moment they heard six shots fired with the utmost rapidity. They started up from their chairs. All the horrors they had ever read in their youth of dreadful murders in mysterious inns curdled their young blood. They had not energy enough to rush into each other's arms for mutual protection. While undecided whether to faint or ring the bell, the door opened, and there entered a light young man in a light overcoat, with a light and airy way about him, the landlord following.

"I have only just heard," the light young man said, "that I may have alarmed you, ladies. I was surrounded by a gang of tramps, who tried to rob me. I aways carry weapons, so I fired a revolver in the air, and off they ran. I trust you were not much startled."

"We were in search of adventures," said Claudia.

"And I was in search of Balliol College, where I am offered a philosophical bed," he rejoined. "But this is too comfortable a corner to quit—the translator of Plato shall wait for me, and I'll sleep in mine host's hay-loft if beds are scarce."

The girls were very happy to have so jolly a comrade unexpectedly. The landlord found him a succulent supper, and he drank the perry most joyously.

"I am an unfortunate man," he said, eating his impromptu supper as if he were not at all unfortunate; "I can't go anywhere without an adventure. From the very first day of my existence, when my infant scream caused the apprehension of a burglar, I have had no day without an extraordinary incident of some sort. Nobody but I, walking to Oxford to listen to metaphysics, would have been driven by a gang of tramps into happy converse with two charming ladies. This is a day to be marked with white chalk."

"You always have adventures?" said Diana.

"Always. Generally, good comes of them. I have detected several scoundrels, and made two or three people happy. I fancy there is some electricity in me which bring events to a point—crystallizes them, one may say. But how con-

foundedly I talk about myself! Do you ladies meet with no adventures?"

"Nothing worse than rain," said Diana. We are shooling: do you know what that means?"

"Of course I do; looking in upon your friends as you zigzag through the world. Awful fun. So you are doing it now? Where next, if it is not wicked to ask?"

"Copse Hill—Mr. Frowde's," said Claudia.

"Frowde! By Jove, is his place so near? I want to see him about a literary matter. Are you going to spend Easter there? Tell him I'll come in a day or two."

"Who shall we tell him will come," said Diana.

"Oh! I'm nobody. Tell him Tix will come. You pass through Bix on your way. Don't confuse them. You'll not mind carrying a Bohemian message to the ex-King of Bohemia?"

"I shall remember," said Claudia; "Tix will come. If Tix breaks his promise he will forfeit all pretension to chivalry."

The light young patrician rose, and wished them good night, saying to Claudia with a smile:

"You can read character."

Next day was radiant. They saw nothing of their overnight acquaintance. The landlord and lady of the Courtenay Arms started them with great glee: all the idlers of the village came to see them mount their dog-cart. A pleasant road, and, to the delight of Rough, chiefly down hill. They passed through a village with a famous church, which was a city and the centre of a great bishopric a thousand years ago; they ate mutton chops at an inn eight hundred feet above the sea level, which is something to boast of when you are not near the Alps; they went down hill, through avenues of fir, till they reached the most ancient town in the county, situated on a delightful reach of the Thames, and then it was but six miles to Copse Hill. There they arrived, without accident or adventure or shower, just long enough before dinner to put themselves in perfect order.

"There is no particular news," said Manly Frowde, when they sat down to dinner. "Your mamma has gone; the new vicar has arrived, and seems a very good fellow; Jack Sebright has not yet made up his mind about anything; the new people at your old place are pleasantly mysterious."

"And everybody still gossips," said Mrs. Frowde.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOSSIP.

Veluti in speculo.

NEXT morning, the air being dry and clear, it was pleasant to stroll about the gravel paths and watch the quiet life of the village. When Frowde gave himself a holiday the gift was a perfect one: the flight of the goosequill ceased; he deliberately lazed. After the meal—half lunch, half breakfast, which he called "prandium"—host and hostess and their two guests took the morning easily. What did they see? Miss Tattleton's shop opposite: that lady's factotum, old John Brown, getting out surreptitiously through the orchard gate, and pricking his legs as he wound deviously through the furze to the Pleiades for beer (a trick of his half-a-dozen times daily), vainly imagining that he is unseen by his mistress; two huge furniture vans, red and gold, standing by the inn—for the carrying trade is busy just after quarter-day; a tall, well set-up man-servant, with iron-grey hair, coming from what Mr. Wemys used to call his postern-gate, and also making for the Pleiades; men digging sand upon the hill;—finally, four people coming home from morning prayers—for it is Passion Week—namely, old General Conway's wife and daughter, Mr. Perivale, and the ever-youthful Mrs. Lovelace. She makes straight to Miss Tattleton's in search of gossip, thereby disappointing Mr. Perivale, who has set his heart on doing the very same thing.

Mrs. Biggins feeding her pigeons in front of the Pleiades—so tame that they fly up to her hand—looks picturesque. It was a brilliant morning, and, as one of the Misses Conway remarked to Manly Frowde when passing his gate, it was strange to have just been saying the prayer, "Lighten our darkness." The new vicar being of an undecided temperament, and anxious to please everyone, had arranged morning prayer at twelve o'clock, that the school-children might attend without interference with their lessons—though whether it pleased the children to have their play-time taken is doubtful. Then the vicar's mind was perplexed as to whether midday was matins or evensong, and the latter was finally fixed on.

It was just after even-song, then, at about a quarter to one,

that John Brown made his fourth journey through the furze to the Pleiades. John was quite a character in his way. He prided himself on being well educated—'twas even rumoured that he had once learnt Latin: but a few old school books carefully treasured up were the only present signs of John's education. John could bake, if he could do nothing else; and when he kept steady, he was as good a baker as could be found in the country round. He had been baker to Miss Tattleton's aunt, her predecessor in the business, when Miss Tattleton was only assistant in the shop, and gossips said that John had regarded his mistress's niece tenderly. But that was a long time ago. For many years John has now had an indulgent mistress in Miss Tattleton, though he never can be brought to regard her as his mistress. He considers himself as part of the establishment; and when, through his great attachment to beer, Miss Tattleton is driven to give him notice, he argues with her that he was there before her, so why should he leave?

On occasions, when he has been unusually aggravating, Miss Tattleton has been known to shut him out, and declare he shall never enter her doors again; but she always relents, for she has a soft heart, though a spiteful tongue. John is proud of his gardening powers, and turns Miss Tattleton's garden to the best advantage. As he is working there he often sees Ralph passing in and out of Mr. Forncett's back gate, and a few remarks pass between them. In fact, John is one of the very few villagers to whom Ralph ever speaks. But John's remarks have not yet shown any tendency towards gossip. They are generally on gardening matters—as, for instance, "I've just been a-settin' the early peas, and I'm blessed if the sparrers haven't begun at 'em already;" or, "Them blessed little birds are a-eatin' up all the fruit blossom, and this here new Act of Parlyment won't let you shoot 'em."

But it occurred to Ralph, who was ready to do anything for his master, that the acquaintance with John might be improved to some advantage, so he followed him to the Pleiades.

"Hullo!" said Biggins, "here comes that silent fellow of Forncett's. Wonder what he wants here? I suppose he's got tired of keeping all to hisself. They in general gets tired of that sort of thing, and comes round in the end. It's no good for the gentry to think they're going to keep their servants all to theirselves—'cos it ain't in human nature, I say."

Ralph and John entered, earnestly engaged in talking of

the immense size of what John called his brockylows. Ralph begged John to allow him to offer him some beer, and they soon left to go together to see John's wonderful "brockylows" in Miss Tattleton's garden.

"Nice view you have up here," said Ralph. "You look quite down on us and the neighbouring houses." Miss Tattleton's garden slanted up one side of the knoll.

"It's an author who lives over there, isn't it?" said Ralph.

"Yes, that's him at the gate, and a rum character he is, though he's mighty clever, I believe; and those two young ladies are daughters of the old lady who used to live at the next house."

"A Mr. Temple lives there now, doesn't he?" said Ralph.

"I think that's the name," said John.

"Is there a Mrs. Temple?"

"I think so, but if you want to know, you ask *her*," turning his thumb towards the house, "she knows everything;" and he gave a knowing nod, to express his belief in Miss Tattleton's omniscience.

"Oh! it is not important," said Ralph, "but before I go I want to go into the shop to inquire about the postage of a foreign letter."

"Then you might as well come this way, and I can show you some young ducks that one of our old hens has hatched."

When John had done the honours of the garden and poultry-yard, he went to see if Miss Tattleton was disengaged, being rather anxious to introduce Ralph in a ceremonious way, as he considered him a superior man, and was proud of his acquaintance. But he came back looking mysterious, and thrusting his thumb over his shoulders and shutting up one eye, he said,

"She's got one of 'em in there a-gossipping, one of the regular ones."

At this moment Mrs. Lovelace took up her dainty parasol and tripped out of the shop, and John announced to Miss Tattleton that "this gentleman's been a-looking at our brockylow, and says it beats his out and out."

"Good morning," said Miss Tattleton, rather stiffly, for she was offended that Ralph had never been to see her before. "I am sure I wonder you'll condescend to look at my garden: I thought you were too proud to come near a poor old woman like me."

"You're certainly not old, and you don't look poor," said Ralph.

"Ah, that's your flattery; you want to make it up after treating me so badly, and ordering the servants not to come near my place. I know all about it—you can't keep things secret from me."

"So it seems," said Ralph.

"You ought to make it up by being a very good customer."

"So I will," said Ralph, looking all round to see what he could possibly buy, and seeing nothing that could be of any use to him.

"Well, if you want to do me any good," said Miss Tattleton, in a serious and imploring tone, "don't go and frighten everybody from coming to my shop. What have I done that I am to be shunned? I know it is all through the old woman who used to live over there," pointing to Winterslow; "she began it, and she has left her sting behind her."

"Perhaps you'll find the new people behave better. That is the gentleman and his daughter, is it not?" said Ralph, pointing to Mr. Temple and Kate, who had just come out of the gate in the lane to meet Mr. Frowde, Diana, and Claudia.

"Yes," said Miss Tattleton, "and I believe that old woman frightened them from coming to my shop."

"I think you must be wrong," said Ralph, "she looked such a kind old lady."

"Yes; very kind, not to like her own flesh and blood," she replied sharply.

"Is there a Mrs. Temple?" asked Ralph.

"Yes; but she never comes out: I suppose she's an invalid."

"Elderly lady, perhaps?"

"Oh, no! I've seen her from a distance in the garden, but I've heard she's quite young, and looks more like Miss Temple's sister."

"Well," said Ralph, looking round the shop, and putting half-a-sovereign down; "I promised to be a customer, so I'll buy this gridiron," and pointed to one that was hanging above his head: "I like to cook my own steaks."

"You're a lucky man if you have steaks to cook—they are not too plentiful in these parts. This is one-and-twopence; what else can I sell you?"

Ralph looked round, and was puzzled. He felt that, having asked questions, it was his duty to spend money; but he could not think in a moment what would be least useless of all the things around him. So he said, incontinently, "Just make up the rest in saucepans—good morning," and he walked quickly out.

"Well, he's an odd character," thought Miss Tattleton.

So thought also Mr. Forncett's cook.

"What have Mr. Ralph been a-doing," she said to the housemaid, "a-sending in these rubbishing tin saucepans, when we've plenty of good iron and copper ones."

Meanwhile Mr. Temple and Manly Frowde and the ladies were chatting in the lane.

"How do you like the house?" said Diana to Kate.

"Oh! I like it very well," said Kate; "and the garden and fields are delightful."

"I used to think it such a dreary house," said Claudia; "I fancied there was always an echo when we spoke, as if the house were empty and haunted. Oh, I hated it!"

"Oh!" said Kate suddenly, "are you the mysterious daughters?"

Diana and Claudia looked surprised.

"Kate, my dear," said her father, "how rude you are! I hope you will excuse my daughter," he said, turning to Diana, "but she never thinks before she speaks."

"Really," said Diana, "I like anything mysterious, and shall be quite glad to know what Miss Temple means."

The interview with Mrs. Selfe was explained as gently as possible by Mr. Temple, who was afraid of hurting the feelings of the ladies by any allusion to an unpleasantness between them and their mother, for he had heard how matters stood from Manly Frowde.

"I think," said Mr. Frowde to Kate, "you had better come in as often as you can during the next few days, and make the acquaintance of these mysterious ladies."

Kate looked quite willing to do so.

"If you encourage her too much, Mr. Frowde," said Temple, "you'll soon find her troublesome, and want to get rid of her."

"I'll tell her when I do," he said.

So Kate Temple was soon on good terms with the Frowdes and Diana and Claudia. She learnt to find her way in at Mr. Frowde's little wicket-gate, to which, being only three or four yards from the gate of Winterslow, she could run across without putting on her hat. Mr. Frowde's dogs used to rush to meet her when she lifted the latch, and went barking after her up the garden path to the cottage. No doubt in their own language they remarked to one another, as their master and mistress did, that their new acquaintance was a very pleasant one—for dogs have decided opinions on human beings.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE PAST.

RAFAEL: He met *himself*, you say?
ASTROLOGOS: He met himself, my lord,
Creeping to bed along the half-lit corridor,
He met his boy-self, daring, dauntless, devilish,
Poising a rapier with a man's heart's blood on it.
He died that night.—*The Comedy of Dreams.*

IT might be a pleasant thing, perchance, to meet one's past and half-forgotten self. The aged poet or philosopher might like to see his gay boy-self before him, wild as the winds and happy as the birds. The ancient lady, calm in the thought of a well-ordered life, and ready for the lovelier life to come, might rejoice to look at her own pretty girl-self, when she had her naughtinesses, and was possibly a precocious flirt. I suppose we all dream of being young again. It is an intuitive prophecy of that renewal of youth, whether for good or evil, which is the inevitable destiny of every immortal soul.

But to meet a past self amid past scenes of sadness or terror, of lost love or broken honour, is true torture. The most severe punishment that can befall a human soul is the consciousness of having done a wrong that has no remedy. "I have done an evil thing, and I cannot atone." To feel this, is anguish beyond all that Dante dreamt of hell. Yet there is compensation: since that remorse, that ayenbite (to use good English), can only be felt by the spirit which has kinship to the Divinity. From finite evil God works infinite good. But in these days the tempting devil is degenerate: lordly Satan, the rebel archangel, scarred with thunder, has given way to polite Belial, who sets the fashion; to obese Mammon, who deals in Turks and Egyptians; to Mephistopheles, who keeps the divorce court going; to Asmodeus, who makes even good folks eager for uncharitable gossip.

Frank Forncett was only too sure that he was now face to face with the past. He fancied he had forgotten. Can any true man forget his first and only true love? The old days came back to Forncett—the pleasant time with Leonora, a creature of royal beauty, of angelic purity, of passionate power. Vividly returned to him the happy scenes in calm old-fashioned gardens, where yew-walks were plentiful, where fountains plashed, and peacocks screamed, and every sun-dial had a

different Latin motto. If only he had said the right word at the right instant! But he had not: he had been too slow, too timid, too doubtful of winning so great a prize; and there came to the front one who never doubted, one who had no scruples and no fears, one who achieved in a moment what he, Frank Forncett, had been trying to achieve for I know not how long. And then, what followed? This interloper, careless of what he so easily had won, threw Leonora contemptuously aside, and carried his madness elsewhere. He committed a double crime.

"I suppose I had better go away," said Forncett to himself. "Why, now, have I been brought where I can see Leonora? I wish I could see her husband: I think I could administer a sufficient horse-whipping. Well, 'tis strange we should both come to this out-of-the-way village, but I suppose Providence meant something to happen. I'll go and smoke."

I fancy that in the curling white wreaths he sometimes detected the graceful form of Leonora—as he remembered her in her joyous girlhood.

And Leonora?

Yes, she had recognized Frank Forncett—a man not easily forgotten by a lady, even if she did not chance to fall in love with him. And to her his presence—even though it was certain they need never meet—was a terror and a pain. It brought back again her happy girlhood. They had been boy and girl together, and the vision had come back to her, as it also came back to him. He had gone round the world, and been hardened by innumerable adventures, yet every nerve trembled to the tender reminiscence of a divine romance that ended in disappointment. She, after patient suffering, had ripened into tranquil womanhood: yet, when she saw Frank Forncett, no longer a boy, every nerve within her also trembled, and she felt as if she were again the girl who longed to be told that she was loved. The old time came back again, and all that had intervened seemed trivial.

She remembered one scene. It was at the gate of an ancient, quaint flower-garden, the air heavy with summer fragrance. He was about to mount his horse and ride away. There was a strange soft light, the prelude of a perfect sunset, in the western sky. A white peacock spread his fans upon the garden wall, looking like a bird cut in Parian marble. A fountain plashed close by. She remembered the caw of the rooks, the coo of the doves—she remembered, above all, the loving look in her young sweetheart's eyes. "Oh! why, why, why

does he not ask me?" was the stifled cry of her heart: and he, not knowing that the magic moment had come, rode away with the question unasked . . . and never had the chance to ask it. For the next morning brought a suitor who did not hesitate—a suitor handsome and wealthy and bold, who pleased her father well, and who half pleased, half terrified, wholly mesmerized, Leonora. He won her easily. He cast her away as easily. But the story must not yet be told.

Leonora, having definitely ascertained that Forncett was so near to her, went to Mr. Temple at once.

"What is to be done?" she said. "Must we leave this place? What terrible destiny brings us together in this way?"

"Don't exaggerate your annoyances," he replied. "I never knew whether you cared much about Forncett, for you must remember I was away at Constantinople during most of the time he visited at the dear old place. You wrote me some pretty romance about him. I believe I have the letters yet, for I always kept your letters—they were so full of life. When I came back, Forncett was not spoken of, and you were engaged to be married to——"

"Oh! please say no more, William! The thought is horrible. What a fool I was! What a mere girlish bashful fool! Suppose I had told Frank I wanted him to marry me! How delighted he would have been!"

"Yes, Leonora, that is true enough," replied Temple, with the grave smile of the diplomatist. "Yes, but why could you not tell him with glance of eye or pressure of hand? It is all over—a *coup manqué;* but I do not see that his proximity need trouble you. You will not meet him. Even if you should, I see no harm. He has probably quite forgotten you."

"I am sure he has not," she said, with emphasis.

"That means, you have not forgotten him. Why should you? He is a pleasant poetic memory of your happy girl-time, before the inevitable troubles of the world assailed you. You made a hero of him. I doubt not he is a dull prosaic sort of fellow, without an idea—or else a gay Lothario, who has had fifty thousand flirtations since he kissed you in his boyhood."

"William, you are cruel. He never kissed me; and he is neither dull nor wicked; and you have no right to laugh at me in this way. You are almost always kind."

"I am kind now, Leonora, for I am trying to make you understand the truth. You are not a girl, and he is not a boy. Love fancies are not immortal."

Leonora thought they were; but when Mr. Temple grew didactic she was always silent.

"I will call on Frank Forncett," he said.

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM OXFORD TO COPSE HILL.

Old Ramus' ghost is busy at my brain,
And my skull teems with notions infinite.
CHARLES LAMB.

THIS is a world of strange meetings. The man you seem least likely to meet is always the man you do meet. Tixover was a believer, from experience, in this curious contrariety of affairs. He looked at life as a pleasant arrangement of surprises. Nothing is certain but the unforeseen, say the French; and this Tix thought fortunate, since what you do not expect is invariably pleasanter than what you do. For example, he enjoyed much more thoroughly his evening with the two young ladies at that wayside inn than he would have enjoyed it if he had been sitting, as he intended, at the feet of the Gamaliel of Greek. He liked to hear Plato eloquently expounded by his greatest modern disciple; but he preferred the easy original chatter of a couple of lively girls—a talk that, if shallow as a rivulet, had the rivulet's sparkle and life. He did not regret his accidental delay, even though, when he reached Oxford next day, he found that Gamaliel had been called away upon important business, and that he was left to his own devices.

No man need for a moment be dull in the great university city, and least of all an Oxford man. Tixover might have spent a month there without a moment's dulness had he chosen; but he had other ideas in his head. So, after strolling with a few friends in Christchurch meadow, and chatting with one or two more at the Union, he made his way to the Mitre for a dinner and bed. There are a good many new hotels in these times, but most Oxford men believe in the Mitre.

Tixover had declined several invitations to dinner, because he did not particularly care for the men who invited him. All good fellows, you know—all sure to turn out very fine fellows in due time; but so uncomfortably *young*. Youth is a great thing for its possessor; but its delighted bumptiousness is not

always attractive. A young colt gaily kicking up his heels is a charming object—at a distance. And university youth is perhaps more trying to one's philosophy than other and even inferior youth; for in Oxford and Cambridge there grows among these boys an opinion that outside this microcosm there is nothing worth consideration; and your cosmopolitan does not much care to be troubled with a young fellow who is utterly ignorant of the world without—whose ideas are those of a preparatory school. Heaven forfend that I should say a word against the two great universities—more especially against Oxford, "the great mother of Churchmen and Tories"—but there is no harm in the remark that university men, *in statu pupillari*, are apt, however precocious they may be, rather to bore men of the world.

So Lord Tixover escaped from several young friends who gladly would have entertained him in noble fashion, and contrived to slip away to the Mitre, where he got his cutlet and claret in a corner of the coffee-room. As he sat, after dinner, tacitly thanking Venables for the excellence of his Lafitte, he noticed at the next table a man who, having dined in a leisurely way, appeared to be doing much the same thing. Anybody at all unusual invariably attracted Tix, and this indolent diner at the Mitre was just the sort of fellow that aroused his inquiring mind.

"By Jove," he thought, holding his goblet to the light, to catch the golden sparks that scintillate through the lambent violet of a fine claret, "that man's an original. His head hath brains. His spectacles give him rather a profound look. What is he, I wonder? Not a professor, or he'd hardly be dining here. I must make his acquaintance. How shall I do it? Tread on his toe by accident? or pretend to mistake him for Dr. Pusey?"

While Tixover was pondering hereon, the man with the spectacles rose and left the room. Tix followed him.

"I must introduce myself to that man," he said to himself; "I like the look of him. He mayn't be anything remarkable, but he's not common-place."

The wearer of the spectacles was standing at the inn door, looking out upon brilliant moonlight, which made the glorious High Street of Oxford magical. To him said Tixover:

"The old city is fine by this light. It is a city of moonlight. Youngsters don't know what sunlight means till they get from the university into the world."

"Some of us," the other said, "have to face the world with-

out help from the university. And I have heard it said that a university education would have spoilt Shakespeare."

"Whose paradox was that?"

"One Manly Frowde's. I don't suppose you know anything of him. He's a cousin of mine, with a craze for writing novels and poetry."

"If you're a cousin of Frowde's," said Tixover, "shake hands at once. He is an old friend of mine. I'm going to look in upon him to-morrow for an hour or two."

"I have promised to be there to-morrow," said Branscombe, "and to spend Easter with him. Will you go by the coach? It starts from the Clarendon, and will put us down at his gate."

"Capital," said Tixover, and thus it was settled; and the two new acquaintances ended the evening with a game of billiards, in which the Viscount (who played all games to perfection) had too easy a victory over "the man with the spectacles."

What is there more enjoyable than a fast drive behind four horses through a pleasant country in fine weather? Mr. Stanley Gay, who took the coach on the latter part of the journey, was a coachman of the right sort: his horses gave him so little trouble that he had ample time to talk to his passengers. Half-an-hour for luncheon at a most comfortable hotel in the town, famed for Archbishop Laud and biscuits, gave the travellers an opportunity of trying some dry Heidsieck, admirably iced.

They were a merry coach load, most of the party being Oxford men, to whom fun is rather more natural than study. There were also one or two ladies going to town: probably they will stay in London next day for some shopping, and get home by rail; for Mr. Gay leaves the White Horse Cellar at ten in the morning, and what lady could possibly be in Piccadilly at that frightfully early hour? Hence Mr. Gay, a student of human nature and statistics (one of which is often mistaken for the other) remarked that it was much easier to take about ninety per cent. of the female world to London than to bring fifty per cent. back.

Harry Branscombe and Lord Tixover became great friends on the top of the coach. They had a common measure. What was it? You will hardly guess. *Romance.* That Tix has a strong vein of romance in him everyone knows who has noticed his adventurous career; but who would expect anything of the kind from the staid Harry, who does business of much magni-

tude with infinite gravity—eyeing the world behind his spectacles like Minerva's oldest and most sapient owl? Yet he has it in him: and the Viscount found it out; and by the time Stanley Gay pulled up at Frowde's green gate, they were on the most intimate terms.

At that gate they were welcomed by a joyous group. Beside the master and mistress, Diana and Claudia were there in the gayest costume, suitable for vernal shooling; and stalwart Jack Sebright and piquant Kate Temple made up the party. Kate was ravishing. Her cheeks had a softer bloom than ever—her lips a sweeter dew. She was a perfect little picture. Tix, who has the keenest eye in the world, said to himself, as he caught her gay shy glance,

"That girl's in love, or she could not be so confoundedly pretty."

"You can sleep anywhere, I know, Tix," said Frowde, when introductions were over, and the travellers were refreshing themselves beneath the trees. "Our cottage is small, but we can squeeze a good many people into it, thanks to the irregular rooms it contains."

"I can sleep on a mantelpiece, or a kitchen table," said the Viscount. "Mr. Disraeli has somewhere remarked that we mistake comfort for civilization. It is one of the most pregnant of his aphorisms. I hate comfort."

"Let us try to make him uncomfortable," said Diana. "An apple-pie bed might satisfy him, if properly made. The right way is to take away one of the sheets altogether."

"I defy you, ladies," said Tix, "I am never so happy as when I am conquering difficulties. If you can make me uncomfortable with such delightful company, and such poetic surroundings, you will also make me ashamed of myself. But I defy you."

The literary business whereon Tixover wanted to speak to Frowde was soon settled, and the afternoon and evening were right pleasant. At dinner the Viscount, who never missed an opportunity of studying character, contrived to draw Jack Sebright into conversation, and to elicit from him the burden of his life—a sacerdotal future.

Tixover laughed right merrily.

"I have often thought I should like to turn parson by-and-by. I honour your scruples, Mr. Sebright, and wish there were a few other men as scrupulous. We are in a strange state just now: the clergy are attempting to destroy the Church of England, and the laity are determined to maintain

it. The clergy are becoming a caste and forgetting their humanity. Rare old Bishop Latimer once said to his hearers, 'There were never before so many gentlemen and so little gentleness.' If he lived now, he would say there never was such a noisy set of clergymen with so little Christian love."

"You are hard on the parsons, Tix," said Frowde. "With the exception of a few strong-brained men who will never be bishops, the clergy rather distrust me; but I am a strong supporter of the priestly order, and I desire to see the Church of England so firmly established that none dare dream of attacking her. At the same time, you know I am what is inaccurately called an Erastian."

"Upon honour," interrupted Jack Sebright, "if you're going to be as learned as this, I shall give up the Church altogether. I haven't brain for it. I appeal to the ladies."

"We are all with you," said Mrs. Frowde. "Parson Adams's wife said it was wicked to quote Scripture out of church: I say it is intolerable to talk theology at dinner."

"I am rebuked," said Tixover. "But may I just remark that it is highly probable I shall end my career as a clergyman? When a man has seen the world—say, at seventy—I think he may venture to mount a pulpit and teach the people. Not an hour before, in my judgment. I think I shall prefer to wait till I am eighty."

"Let us hope we shall all be there to hear your first sermon," said Mrs. Frowde. "I suppose you have a living in the family."

"Faith, yes; one of the best in England. Three thousand a-year, and only two hundred souls in the parish. My great-uncle, who is nearly ninety, has grown mellow in that rectory for half a century or more. He gives his curate five hundred a-year, which I take to be unique; but he says he doesn't see how a gentleman can live on less."

Dinner over, they adjourned to Frowde's book-room. There was no withdrawing-room in that cottage, nor did the ladies withdraw from the dinner-table before the men. The book-room, with bay-windows, looking over the moonlit lawn, with pleasant pictures and photographs on the walls, with books in every available corner, was cosy and pleasant.

"This is your workshop, Frowde," said the Viscount.

"Mine and my wife's. We wedge our writing-tables into two different windows, not to elbow each other too closely. I always think the great necessity of existence is elbow-room."

"Can you get that in the Church?" said Jack Sebright, in a forlorn tone, that made every one laugh.

"It much depends on the strength of your elbows," said Tix.

"Will nobody sing?" said Frowde. "We want song to make this evening perfect. Come, Miss Temple, you will charm us with music, I know."

With face rose-flushed, and a soft light in her eyes, Kate Temple sang:—

Only a touch, and nothing more:
Ah! but never so touched before!
Touch of lip, was it? Touch of hand?
Either is easy to understand.
Earth may be smitten with fire or frost—
Never the touch of true love lost.

Only a word, was it? Scarce a word!
Musical whisper, softly heard,
Syllabled nothing—just a breath—
'Twill outlast life, and 'twill laugh at death.
Love with so little can do so much—
Only a word, sweet! Only a touch!

The feelings of Jack Sebright, as Kate sang that songlet, may be left to the imagination of any reader who is in love—and we devoutly hope we have not a reader who is not in love. Nobody thanked Kate for her song, since it just suited the moment: they might as well have thanked the moon for being at the full. And a little later the party broke up, and Kate was escorted to her gate—almost twenty yards—by the whole force of the company. And it is credibly thought Jack Sebright squeezed her little roseleaf of a hand.

"I shall go and dip in the Thames to-morrow at six," said the Viscount. "Who'll join me?"

"I," said Harry Branscombe.

"I also," said Jack Sebright.

"No theology on the road," said Tix; "leave matins to the lark. Will eleven be too early for breakfast, Mrs. Frowde?"

"It is our unchangeable hour," she replied.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CRUCIAL INTERVIEW.

A word is oft as potent as a thunderbolt.

MR. TEMPLE was glad that his daughter should have the society of her neighbours, although himself disinclined to make new intimacies. Kate, therefore, running in at pleasure to chat with Mrs. Frowde, and to borrow any books that took her erratic fancy, had several times encountered Jack Sebright, and had not failed to perceive that he was uncommonly glad to find her at the cottage when he happened to call. There was a fine frankness in Jack's character which made it impossible for him to hide any feeling which he entertained, and Kate had enough feminine quickness to discover very soon how much he admired her, and enjoyed her society. Can a woman ever precisely tell the actual moment when her feeling towards a man passes from mere liking into actual love? It was, and probably is now, the code of wise mothers and aunts that "it does not become a young woman" to give away her heart until she is asked for it. And perhaps, in the pure heart of a maiden, love never does become a living thing until she is asked to love—only that same asking does not always require words, but may be done with the pressure of a hand or the glance of an eye. Certes, at this happy Eastertide Jack Sebright had uttered to Kate Temple no word of love: whether he had asked and been answered in some subtle way we leave the reader to judge. At any rate, they were very happy when together, and not very miserable when apart.

Jack's chief source of trouble was that tender conscience of his. Why should a tender conscience dwell within such a young Hercules? It did, unluckily for Jack's peace of mind. As he rode along, thinking of the future, now illumined by a dream of delight, he would check his visionary fancies suddenly. It perpetually troubled him that his desire to win Kate Temple seemed to act upon him as an incentive to please his father and take orders. The Rev. Marston Sebright had many intimate friends in the ecclesiastical hierarchy: once a priest, Jack's upward course would be easy. He often pictured himself in a comfortable rectory, with delightful gardens and conservatories in which Kate might disport her-

self, growing all the flowers she loved. Yet the vision did not quite satisfy.

"Hang it, Bessie!" he would ejaculate to his mare, "it doesn't seem right for a parson to be in love. It's beneath him, or above him—I don't know which. Fancy the Reverend Romeo! It won't do, lass, now will it? And then Kate? She a parson's wife! All the parsons' wives I know are grave and demure: Kate's all laughter and song. If I could only be a soldier—or an author, like Frowde, but that wants brains—or anything with some life in it."

And then he would take Bessie over a few fences just to get rid of his irritation. But he could not get rid of the inevitable dilemma. To marry Kate he must become a parson: and he doubted his fitness to be a parson, or hers to be a parson's wife; and he doubted whether love in a parsonage was at all the radiant electric delicious thing which love is in places less decorous. Kate Temple of course was a little teased about Jack's state of mind by those keen observers, Diana and Claudia.

"Really, Kate," said Diana, "it's too bad of you to have taken Jack Sebright away from me. I have made up my mind to have him, and I intended to make him become a bishop, for it would be such fun to be a bishopess."

"I can't imagine him in an apron," said Claudia; "and if I may mention his legs, I think they are almost too well-developed for black cloth gaiters."

"If there were a few bishops of Jack's build, they would not disestablish the Church in a hurry," said Diana.

"Would you really like to marry Mr. Sebright?" said Kate, looking a little serious.

"If he were ten years older perhaps I might," said Diana.

Ten years was a long period in Kate's mind, and Jack seemed to her already perfect; therefore she wondered why Diana could wish him to be older.

Diana and Claudia left Copse Hill a few days after Easter, but Kate continued her visits, and became a great favourite with Mr. and Mrs. Frowde. It would have been strange if she had not. She was as gay a girl as God ever created—sweet as a flower, blithe as a bird, pure as a breeze from the south born between sky and sea. To Frowde, a poet, she was a divine picture: to his wife, a philosopher, she was a delightful study. Kate Temple had many charms, but her absolute unconsciousness of those charms was, in verity, the chief charm of all.

Kate was a musical child, and could make melody. When Frowde discovered this, he wrote lines to which she made fair music of her own, and sang them blithely on the lawn. Here is one such :—

"On this green path, through this deep glade,
Lovers may linger, unafraid
Of the unloving world, whose way
Is to betray.

"Through fluttering leaves the dim lights gleam,
Leading, misleading, like a dream :
Each turn o' the path has marvels new—
That's Love's way too.

"Lo, now a cavern, dark and cool,
Green moss beside a shadowy pool,
Such silence as the hush'd air keeps
When Venus sleeps.

"O loitering lover, be thou wise—
Kiss softly lips, kiss gently eyes,
Lest the delicious spell thou break,
And Venus wake."

"Venus Asleep," was Frowde's title for this classic trifle; but in the heart of the pretty musician who found melody for it the invincible goddess was beginning to awake.

Mr. Temple fulfilled his promise to Leonora, and called on Frank Forncett. Years had passed since they met, and their meeting then had been a very brief one. Forncett had only just made the acquaintance of Temple's family, when William Temple, an ambitious young diplomatist, was sent out as attaché to the Embassy at the Sublime Porte. I do not object to that magniloquent phrase. "Porte" means a *gate*, and Byzantium is the gate of Asia: and "sublime," etymologists aver, is simply *supra limum*—"above the mud." If the Turks have at diverse times kept their turbanned heads a trifle above the mud, it is very much to the credit of those followers of the False Prophet. There seems little chance of their doing it much longer.

"It is a strange coincidence," said Frank Forncett to Temple, as they walked gravely up and down the lawn, whose velvet turf and radiant flower-pots did great credit to Ralph's supervision. "I have not forgotten : my life has been a deep regret; I have seen many lands and read many books and made many friends, but one face has always haunted me. It has been a life-long sorrow to me, Temple, but also a life-long delight. But for remembering that lovely face in those

dear old gardens at Temple Cloud, there are times when I should have gone mad. It is hard to conceive the trouble of a lonely man who, by his own default, has lost the one woman who could have given him unimaginable happiness. And yet it would have been a greater misery to me never to have met her—never to have lost her."

"You retain your romance," said Temple, calmly. "Mine is gone."

"Never be too sure of that," replied Forncett. "Do you know that there are springs of pure water in the heart of the earth with such strength that they break through the primeval granite? You may be made of adamant, Temple, but let love touch you and you will find a sudden fissure. If you wish not to renew your romance, keep out of the way of womankind. As for me, I may surely gaze at a distance at the lady whom I loved in my hot youth, without raising a blush on the purest cheek that ever was kissed by the soft air of spring."

"There is no reasoning with a poet," said Mr. Temple; "but I fully agree with all you say, and will convey its substance, in more diplomatic language, to the person interested. You are as chivalrous as Quixote himself, my dear Forncett, and I heartily honour you for the noble way in which you consider this delicate question. Let us henceforth be friends."

"Always," said Frank Forncett, and with the hearty hand-grasp of Englishmen they parted.

Mr. Temple reported the whole conversation (more than we have reported here) to Leonora. To him she said no word: to herself, when alone, she said,

"Yes, he loves me still."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MAIDEN'S PRAYER.

Cras amet qui nunq' amavit.

KATE TEMPLE began to think that she did not know what was the matter with her. She was much happier than ever she had been before, and she could not at all understand why she was happier. And, although happier, she was not quite so gay. She looked upon her older self—only a week or two

older, be it known—as rather frivolous. She began to look at life with precocious wisdom, and had the most sagacious colloquies with her pony and her dogs. From none of those intelligent quadrupeds did she get much help.

Now what had set our little Kate quivering like a silver-rinded birch-tree in the west wind of summer, when every leaf is whirled by the petulant breeze? Why did the sky seem brighter, the grass greener, the note of the nightingale (and Copse Hill is populous with nightingales) more delicious than of old? Kate could only guess. When she connected this strange new feeling of hers with Jack Sebright, the innocent child felt that she blushed all over, though Mr. Charles Darwin assures us, on scientific grounds, that this is an impossibility. Kate felt herself all one blush for being so naughty as to think half-lovingly of Jack, who had never said to her a word which the properest young man might not utter to the demurest young woman. For indeed Jack Sebright, though he would have faced anything male, from a mad bull to a fighting Irishman, was mortally afraid of this little Kate Temple, and had always treated her almost too respectfully. The boy was slow—in erotics, as well as in mathematics and classics. And Kate being a thoroughly simple child, who had never seen any of the silly novels which teach our female youth what they ought never to know, it was clearly a matter of magnetism. It was the old story over again, and as original as when the comedy of love was enacted in Eden. Jack and Kate knew no guile. We will not say, with Lord Palmerston, that they possibly were "born good," for fear of Supralapsarian and Sublapsarian critics; but they certainly had not a naughty idea in their childish heads, and would have found *Adam Bede* or *Cometh up as a Flower* as unintelligible as the Fifth Book of Euclid.

Kate, one radiant morning, tripped to the top of Copse Hill with her dogs, and sat on the wooden seat beneath the larger group of trees. That seat is comparatively new, but it is scarred by many clasp-knives, inscribing initials; and among them, more artistic than the rest, are those of two young sailors, with the inevitable anchor cut beneath. Visitors these of Mr. Frowde's, who

> . . . loves to talk with mariners
> That come from a far countree.

They bring their mates; they bring quaint talk of remote places to which the poet will never wander; they bring opos-

sums and kangaroos, lovebirds exquisite and parrots wisely loquacious; flying squirrels and tree-frogs, coral from Polynesia, and paper dinner-napkins from Japan. They bring, better than all, a visionary fantasy of isles inexplorable, of rivers strangely vast, of the ruined temples of dead nations whose history shall never be known.

Well, here is Kate Temple, sitting on the well-carved seat, swinging her fair-ankled feet—for the said seat is uncomfortably high—and fixing her pretty eyes on the ridge of hills known as the Hog's Back. She is in an Irish frame of mind: she is quite happy, but she might be happier. It is a pleasant scene upon which she looks. "Dim-discovered spires" and towers sleep amidst a sea of foliage; and just below to the left lies Copse Hill Vicarage, an abode of perfect peace, as are all vicarages and rectories. Yes, she is very happy indeed—but . . .

But she suddenly sees something which makes her even happier. It is a young gentleman who comes up the lane by the vicarage: he is walking, but his horse follows him. A stalwart lad, a bonny mare. Kate knows all about it at once, and wishes to goodness she could slip away and run down the hill before Jack Sebright can reach its summit;—that is, she thinks she wishes it. But, in such cases, it is rather hard to analyze.

Any way, she keeps her ground womanfully, while Jack, followed by Bessie, marches up the hill, unperceiving his ladylove. He walks bravely and well, as if he were leading a forlorn hope—until, quite suddenly, he becomes aware of a pretty little figure in a white straw hat, with feet that do not reach the ground, seated beneath the trees amid her dogs. Jack blushes, but marches on—Bessie leisurely following, and now and then stopping to nibble the grass. Bessie had plenty of exercise at this period, and made the best of her lazy intervals.

Why does Kate's heart flutter more than ever before at Jack's arrival? She is conscious that she cannot look at all a dignified little person on that high seat, with her feet in the air: yet she will not get down, for she is afraid to take the first step in anything. She feels somehow that the supreme moment is at hand.

Jack does not. Jack comes up in his usual way—rather awkward and shy, but full of suppressed delight; and then, quite suddenly, as he takes Kate's pretty little hand, he sees a light in her eye which dazzles the depths of his brain, and he

opens his own great eyes wide with a vast surprise, and he says . . .

Well, what he says shall not be narrated here. Neither Jack nor Kate has ever been able to remember. One thing is certain: they sat on that seat beneath the trees, quite unconscious that they could be seen from the vicarage on one side and the Pleiades on the other—quite careless of both parson and publican, quite forgetful of the dogs who wandered home to Winterslow, and of Bessie, who found her way into Manly Frowde's stable, and had a capital feed of oats long before they awoke to the passage of time.

Jack Sebright had not intended to say a word to Kate; but, oh! what are you to do when the loving light in your sweetheart's eyes asks you to speak? Who can refuse? Now, Jack felt he had an enormous business to undertake. There was the grave and dignified Mr. Temple to attack; there was the Rev. Marston Sebright, who would regard marriage as absurd until he was at least a rector—better wait to be a dean; there was his dear mother, who would be jealous of any girl he loved. Yet in his heart he thought of his mother as his best ally. *If she once saw Kate!*

As to Kate, after her happiness, which had a strange element of fear in it, she was glad to run away to bed early. Jack had spent his afternoon at Mr. Frowde's; she had seen a good deal of him under the limes; everything was pleasant. The look he gave her as he brought Bessie to the gate expressed delight and agony in about equal amount. She, quite satisfied with Jack Sebright, was much troubled about herself. Heretofore she had done nothing without reference to her father, whom she loved as few daughters love, seeing that she was the daughter, not of his body only, but also of his soul. Now she had given an irrevocable pledge without a word to him. It terrified her.

And one other thing terrified her. It came upon her suddenly, as she tried to think out the whole combination. *Her mother!* There was a mystery here which the pure child could not understand. There was a sorrow which made her father renounce the society of which he was a natural leader, and live in quietude. Was it something which would make it impossible for her dear Jack—honest noble loving boy—ever to marry her. The child's brain grew confused. She did the wisest thing troubled mortal can do. She knelt by her bedside and prayed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NEW VICAR.

PRINCE RAFAEL. Ha! the new Legate. Has he power and pertinence?
Does he seem worthy Hermes of the Vatican?
Has he the wisdom which befits a cardinal?
ASTROLOGOS. He seems most prudent. I must cast his horoscope.
Born with the sun in Cancer or in Scorpio,
If I mistake not.—*The Comedy of Dreams.*

THE new vicar was a man of good intentions. We all know what place is paved with good intentions. It is to be feared that the Rev. Vypar Voyd was a very good paviour.

It was with the best intentions that, soon after his arrival in Copse Hill, he made a round of visits amongst his parishioners, and tried to elicit from each person his private opinion of his neighbours. He may have supposed that by investigating character in this way he would be better enabled to spiritually guide his flock; and probably he had no doubt in his mind as to whether this was the best way of obtaining a correct estimate of people. At any rate, if he judged by what he heard, he must have supposed he had rather a bad lot to deal with—that is, if his own account be taken into consideration; for no sooner had he heard all that was to be said than he commenced retailing his opinion, formed on such gossip, to everyone. If he visited Squire Ashley, he had something to say against General Conway's family; and when he went to General Conway's he had something to say against Squire Ashley. In the same way he denounced Miss Tattleton to Mr. Frowde as a dangerous woman; and to Mr. Allworthy, the plumber and glazier, he spoke of Mr. Frowde as a very bad man. But this was done with the best intentions, though it was likely to lead to awkward consequences.

But, perhaps the opinion formed by the new vicar of his parishioners might not have been so bad had there not been imparted into the gossip of the place what may be called the Urgent element. Hitherto the gossip at Copse Hill had been comparatively harmless. A good deal of discount had always been allowed on tales heard at the village shop and inn; but when a parson carries a tale there is a certain amount of importance attached to it. A parson may go into the drawing-rooms of the very richest, and into the hovels of the poorest; he has great power with both classes, for either good or evil.

Whether he carry good or evil with him, depends on himself.

Now the Rev. Vypar Voyd had married one of the eight daughters of Rev. Uriah Urgent, vicar of Battlefield, a village two miles from Copse Hill; and the seven unmarried daughters not having many resources in themselves, were rather given to discussing their neighbours' affairs—with perhaps no evil intentions, but for mere excitement.

While Mr. Voyd was making the acquaintance of his parishioners, a batch of three or four of the Miss Urgents were in the habit of coming over to see their sister, to talk with her in a sisterly way on things in general. Hence it happened that they added their store of gossip to what Mr. Voyd was busily collecting. They were girls with a good deal of animal spirits, who seemed always overflowing with the subject on hand, and they would all talk at once in an excited manner on some trifling subject, which seemed hardly worth so much energy.

On the afternoon of the day when Jack Sebright had been made so happy by his interview with Kate on the hill, four of these gushing girls walked over to Copse Hill Vicarage. Their sister told them what she had seen in the morning, and this led to gossip about the Temples. Very soon all tongues were going at once, and Mr. and Mrs. Voyd found it difficult to know which to answer first. A stranger going into the room would have made very little from the fragments of sentences that could he heard:

CONSTANCE: . . . "so very odd."
MARIAN: . . . . . "must have done something."
JENNY: . . . . . "can't be her mother."
BELLA: . . . . "not to come to church."
MRS. VOYD: . . . "most mysterious people."
JENNY: . . . . "so friendly with those Frowdes."
MARIAN: . . . . "ashamed to show herself."
MR. VOYD (solemnly): "something not right."
MRS. VOYD: "Vypar says he has heard something of a Temple divorce case, and thinks——"
MR. VOYD (putting up his finger): "Hu—sh!"

At this point of the conversation Mr. Voyd had, no doubt, the good intention of stopping scandal, but his mysterious "Hush" brought a dead silence, and gave a much greater importance to the story, the end of which the girls were all burning to know; but they discreetly waited till their brother-in-law left the room.

The new vicar either imagined from the gossip he heard that there was great room for improvement, or else fancied that Mr. Bonfellow had not done his duty in the parish, for he soon set to work in earnest to reform the village. Now your earnest and sincere reformer is a great fact; yet somehow he often does a good deal of harm before he succeeds in doing any good. The new vicar was quite earnest and sincere. To him it seemed that his predecessor, Mr. Bonfellow, had done his duty in a loose and lazy fashion. Copse Hill required to be evangelized: there were heretics about who ought to be brought to church or excommunicated. There were female folk whom the vicar thought he might improve by interviews in his study, which was his vague approach to the confessional. In all this he was absolutely doing his best; but parishes, like individuals, have their own old-fangled habits, and Copse Hill had not been accustomed to this style of treatment. Everybody admired the new vicar, but, somehow, nobody liked him. The gentry saw clearly that he was a minor light of the Church, and that some day he might do in a diocese what now he was attempting to do in a parish: so they gave him cordial support, and were liberal in their contributions for any charitable purpose. The commonalty were not at first so ready to follow his lead. They had liked Mr. Bonfellow, who regarded every parishioner with a brotherly feeling, and who was neither dogmatist nor disciplinarian; so Mr. Voyd, who was both, came as rather an unsatisfactory contrast. If the country clergy could only realise how much more important is friendly communion with their people, rich and poor, old and young, than any mere matter of rubric or ritual, the Church of England would have a new lease of life.

The vicarage at Copse Hill lies pleasantly beneath the slope of the hill common. There from time immemorial cricket had been played on Sunday afternoons; and before Copse Hill church was built, when the people of the hamlet went to a lovely thirteenth-century church a mile and a half away, the rector thereof had been in the habit of coming to look at the cricket match if the Copse Hill folk came to morning service. Mr. Bonfellow had tolerated this Sunday afternoon cricket; so had his predecessors, who rose to high positions in the Church; but Mr. Voyd could not endure anything so dreadful, and induced the cricketers to give up their play by starting a cricket club which had its meetings on Wednesdays, and which won eternal fame because the players insisted on

wearing their pads on the wrong leg. His intentions throughout were excellent, but the best intentions often fail. The cleverest cricketers of Copse Hill were men who could not afford to throw away their Wednesday afternoons; hence, when there was a match with any neighbouring parish club, Copse Hill was always ignominously defeated. The boys who on Sunday afternoons had fagged out, and been useful, now passed the time in loafing about, drinking vile beer, running after the girls, and otherwise wasting their time. Well-intentioned was the new vicar, yet he somehow always added pavement to Hades.

The failure of his excellent intentions was not, however, at first perceived; and very much was expected from him both by the upper and lower classes, between whom he drew a definite line—which is rather a dangerous thing to do.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MASTER OF HERMENEUTICS.

ALOUETTE. Papa, I want to know—what *is* theology?
It seems to me the hardest of the sciences.
ASTROLOGOS. That much depends upon the way you learn it, child.
I learnt it painfully, from heavy folios:
I let you learn it, being a girl, a feeble thing,
From life of bird and flower, from glowing skies and seas,
And God's voice whispering in the morn-wind's melody.
ALOUETTE. To be a feeble girl is some advantage, then.

The Comedy of Dreams.

MRS. MARSTON SEBRIGHT sat one evening early in May at the drawing-room window, to catch the last bit of sunlight for some delicate lace-mending. She has generally an unruffled face: for she has had little trouble, and takes everything quietly. But on this occasion she looked anxious. There was something the matter with Jack; he was restless and absent-minded, and seldom at home now. He had been accustomed to talk freely with his mother, and now he appeared to avoid conversation with her.

"When he comes home I will certainly find out what is the matter," she thought, as she folded up the lace and put her thimble and scissors in the work-basket.

As she went out of the drawing-room she saw Jack, looking hot and dusty, going up the staircase.

"Hallo, mother," he called out; "I've just come in, and am going to get a bath before dinner."

"Where have you ridden to-day, Jack?" said Mrs. Sebright, following him up the stairs to his bedroom.

"To Copse Hill."

"Copse Hill again, Jack? Mr. Frowde must be tired of you."

"Oh! you know, mother, I promised to go and see my old college friend, Mr. Voyd, who has become the vicar of Copse Hill, and we have been talking over old times."

Jack was a downright honest fellow, and above telling a lie; yet he was trying to make his mother believe that he had gone over to Copse Hill for the sake of seeing the vicar. He had certainly called on the vicar and had a short talk with him on college days; but he was too much interested in someone else to spare time to talk with him. Moreover, the vicar left college soon after Jack entered: so Jack was acting rather deceitfully when he led his mother to suppose that Mr. Voyd was an old friend. But the old proverb says all is fair in love and war. Lovers' affairs to the outside world are generally very trivial, and there is seldom occasion for secrecy. But to the lovers themselves they are of the greatest importance, and secrecy is observed when there is no necessity for it. A son or daughter who has never had a secret from parents will, when a love affair comes, lock it up, and deem it too sacred for even a beloved parent or sister or brother. So Jack, because he was not in a position to go at once to Mr. Temple for his consent, thought he should like to hide his love for Kate; and honest as he was, he was ready to say anything that would prevent him from being found out.

When his mother followed him into his bedroom, she closed the door.

"Jack, dear," she said seriously. "I want you to tell me what is the matter. You are so changed lately. Your manner to me is quite different: sometimes you don't appear to notice when I am speaking to you. Then you are restless, and have lost your appetite, and you don't sleep well, for I continually hear you walking about your room at night. Do tell me what it is, Jack," she said, holding out her hand to him.

Now, Jack was not prepared for this, and was beginning to look very uncomfortable, wondering what he should say. He loved his mother sincerely; and a few weeks ago it would have grieved him for her to have occasion to appeal to him in this way. But his love for his mother seemed so small now compared with his love for Kate.

"Yes, I know I'm restless," said Jack; "and I'm sure I'm sorry, mother, if my manner to you is not the same as ever. I did not know it was different. I'm restless because I've nothing to do; but I think I shall be all right now, for I've quite made up my mind to please the pater, and go into the Church. And I should like to talk to him this evening about it, if he is not busy. I don't mean to lose time now; and I must not lose time in getting my bath, or I shall be late for dinner."

Mrs. Sebright said no more, though in reality by no means satisfied with Jack's manner. Mothers are usually pretty clearsighted where their boys are concerned, although we believe they sometimes find it difficult to fathom their girls. However, Jack's all-important conversation with his father was to come off this evening; and this, at any rate, was something gained. She left the dinner-table early, on the plea of a slight headache, thinking her son would find his task easier with a glass of port to help him.

However, Jack had no need for "Dutch courage": he opened his case as readily as if he had been the Attorney-General, with the very simple statement—

"Father, I should like very much to take orders as soon as possible."

The rector looked at him curiously. He knew his youthful impetuosity, and quite expected that some day or other he would come to a sudden resolve; but his present communication was made with startling abruptness, However, he only said:

"I am glad to hear it, my dear boy. To-morrow I will write to my friend, Dr. Sutton, who has kindly promised to read theology with you for a time."

Jack's face grew long. He had not thought of this. He dreaded the idea of going to London, drudging away at the most difficult of all sciences, and never being refreshed by a gay glance from the lady of his heart.

"Surely, father," he urged, "you can teach me all that I shall require: I hate the thought of leaving home. I am sure I could study very well here."

"No, indeed," was the reply. "I have always looked forward to your being trained by the greatest living master of hermeneutics. I, you know, have for years been busy with the classics: I have fallen far behind the great modern developments of scientific theology: but Sutton is our most thoughtful and suggestive teacher, and I am grateful that you

will have so fine an opportunity of qualifying yourself for a career which has been denied to me. Don't waste it, Jack, for your mother's sake and mine: it is the dream of our lives that you shall fill a prominent place in the Church, and be a worthy grandson of the good and great prelate whose name you bear."

"Will it be a long business, father?" asked Jack, who saw too plainly that his fate was sealed, and thought in melancholy fashion of the coming trouble. He imagined himself brooding over big folios, and quite unable to make anything of their contents, because a vision of a laughing girl, with the archest face in the world, would always interpose between him and the perplexing page. He imagined himself listening in a half-dream to the wise sayings of the greatest master of hermeneutics, and wondering whether Kate was swinging her pretty feet from that Copse Hill seat, and looking wistfully toward the green winding lane along which he and Bessie were wont to come.

"It will depend chiefly on yourself," said his father. "Sutton is a marvellous teacher, and if you use the same energy and concentration which you did, to my complete satisfaction, at college, you may satisfy him of your fitness to pass the bishop's examination in a very few months."

"A few months!" thought Jack, but he said nothing. A few months of hermeneutics was an awful prospect for this eager lover. He wished he could get over these theological fences as he was wont to take timber with Bessie under him. He had not forgotten all his Greek: he knew that ἑρμηνεύω came from Hermes; and, while trying hard to think of something more to say to his father, he was mentally execrating the gayest deity of Olympus for having been name-giver to so dire a science.

"I think I will write to Dr. Sutton to-night," resumed Mr. Sebright, "and if you are riding early you can take it to the first post for me. Now that, with God's blessing, you have decided, Jack, I wish to waste no time. I have not hurried you in this, the most important matter in your life—and indeed in mine also—but now I am eager to see you doing work in the Church. Jack, my dear boy, you have made me very happy; you will make me happier still if you go on nobly in your career,—if you let me see my only son holding such a position in the Church as I vainly aspired to fill."

Mr. Sebright went to his study to write his letter. Poor Jack had no spirit to go and talk to his mother, but walked

off rather mournfully to bed. His father's passionate ambition for him, conscientiously suppressed while Jack was unable to make up his mind, almost alarmed him. He had gradually brought himself to look upon the Church as merely the means of settlement in life: now he found that his father expected of him a devotion to his sacred calling which seemed beyond his reach. A very restless night had Jack; but he could imagine no way of escape. He saw that his father could not endure disappointment now that he had announced his intention to take orders. Awake long before any other member of the household, he found his father's letter to the formidable doctor on the study table, saddled Bessie himself, and rode off with it across country to the post town.

"Ha, Bessie," he said, when he dropped the letter into the box, "you little know what a deal of trouble this will cause to you and me, and somebody else that is better than either of us."

The great theologian was only too ready to receive Jack, with intent to make a bishop of him. He was under weighty obligations to Marston Sebright. They had been at college together, and, but for Sebright's friendly coaching, Sutton would infallibly have failed to take a degree, having a strange incapacity for classical learning. And for years the proofs of all his books went through the hands of Marston Sebright, who not only corrected them, but also enriched them with recondite classical illustration. So Dr. Sutton had good reason to oblige his old friend, and he undertook his task with most friendly readiness.

Everything was hurried forward. Mrs. Sebright, with maternal solicitude, provided an outfit for London that would have sufficed for a tour round the world. It was only a day or two before Jack's departure that he could get from Ashton Minima for a flying visit to his friends at Copse Hill. Frowde was busy: Mrs. Frowde soon received all his confidence, and heard of the tremendous task he had to undertake, and laughed him out of much of his trouble.

"Long words generally mean small things," she sagely remarked: "what you take in the mist for a giant is often a boy on a donkey. With your vital energy, you need fear nothing."

"Couldn't you find time to write me a short note now and then, and tell me about our friends? It would be so kind of you."

"Well, if anything important happens, I'll see what can be

done. If Mr. Voyd goes, for example, I think I shall telegraph that you may apply for the living at once. And if Miss Temple should marry, I am sure you will like to hear of it, and get an invitation to the wedding breakfast. By the way, here she is coming in at the wicket-gate. Do entertain her for a few minutes, for I want to order dinner."

So the two young people wandered away down the lime alley, and Jack Sebright told his story—half ruefully, half hopefully—and she laughed gaily at the sesquipedalian science he had to study, and made him a world happier by her cheery talk. They must keep their secret, they both saw clearly, but it need not be for very long: when Jack was once launched in the ecclesiastic sea, a priest full grown, he would feel a right to act for himself. And they were young. The rosy future of happy youth lay before them, more delicious than the rosy sunset which just began to creep into the west as they parted.

Riding homeward over the hill, Jack Sebright encountered the vicar, and told him what was about to happen. Mr. Voyd smiled angelically, and remarked that Dr. Sutton was a great and good man, and that no one could fail to profit by his instructions. Then Jack asked him to drive over to Ashton Minima in his absence, and see his father and mother. This the vicar, with his unfailing kindness, promised to do.

But Jack Sebright would not have asked him if he could have known what would come of it.

CHAPTER XXX.

FLORA SOLITARIA.

Oh, the Earth-Mother's delicate dear ways—
Sweet south-wind breath, flower-fragrance, bird-song clear—
Which say, "Be fearless in these troublous days,
My child, for I am near."

"We are of the earth, earthy." This is no crime, for we are sons of earth. I am not going to write theology. Lord Palmerston is responsible for the statement that all babies are born good, and I fear many people are heterodox enough to agree with him. He disliked the dogma of original sin, but he certainly liked an original sinner.

Flora was of the earth, earthy. She trembled to every

change of wooing or repelling wind. She had been, there is no question, a very naughty girl indeed; but hers was rather a weak and negative naughtiness. Early in her girlhood this poor Flora—a child with strange sensitiveness and a soul that lacked strength—was married by arrangement to one of the best and wisest men in the world. His goodness and wisdom did not enable him to understand his wife. Had he been able to see her as she was, he would have developed her into a creature most loveable. Unhappily, he had not the insight; she seemed to him capricious and frivolous and fretful—nothing more. So there was estrangement between them; and she, a fragile epiphyte, unable to exist alone, fell into the hands of an adroit unscrupulous villain, who cared little for her save as a momentary toy, but whose interest in her grew intense when he found that by ruining her he could make at least three people unhappy for life. She gave way to this fiendish temper: she was divorced from her husband; she was scornfully deserted by the man to whom she owed her evil fate. Then, longing to forget remorse in excitement, she sought gaiety everywhere.

Poor Flora! It is curious that when that inconsequent yet honourable gentleman, Lord Arun, made sincere love to her, it awoke in her frivolous soul something like conscience. She rather looked down upon Arun. He was such a boy. He could not put half-a-dozen words together without being ridiculous. Ay, but so thorough a gentleman! The absolute honour of that simple youth touched poor Flora to the heart. It awoke in her the virtue of self-sacrifice. The saw that, even if she told Lord Arun the tale of her past life in all its sadness, he yet would desire to marry her. She resolved that he should not. She liked him very much, but she would not do him the injury of marriage. Perhaps she faintly saw that, under the guidance of a woman wise and pure, even Lord Arun might show that he was not a fool. Women are for the guidance of men: men for the support and defence of women.

Flora Trevor had told Lord Arun that she was going to Paris. It was a story: she had no such intention. All naughty girls are story-tellers; all good women are truth-tellers by a necessity which they cannot escape. Womanhood in its purity hates a lie. Flora, in a new phase of her many caprices, thought that she would be quiet awhile. She had seen advertised a furnished house in the village of Rowell St. Dunstan (where the church is dedicated to that great prelate who defied the devil), and the fact that the grounds were

surrounded by a wall eight feet high, with *chevaux-de-frise* on the top, seemed to secure isolation. Isolation was at this moment Flora's leading idea. Quite away from all the world she might perhaps lead a penitent if not a pious life. She took the place and went down at once, Estelle wondering whether there was anyone to talk to in such a rustic neighbourhood.

"I will find someone," she said to herself; "they are dull, these English, but they cannot resist wit and beauty. The English farmer will be a new discovery. He is big, I have heard. I like men of a grand mould. I will study the English farmer."

So Estelle: let us hope she will succeed. But her mistress, poor erring creature, only wanted to bury herself now, and be quite forgotten, and live unknown to the world within those walls eight feet high, with *chevaux-de-frise* at the top. There she would try to be good, she thought—try to expiate her sins by a quiet life and charity to the poor. She had much the feeling of a frightened bird. She had no real remorse, but a strange sadness oppressed her. She had done wrong, and knew not how to make amends. Perhaps it was only a momentary mood.

At any rate, there she settled herself with a curious feeling of relief. She was playing hide and seek, and thought she was doing it cleverly. She wanted to get away beyond Lord Arun's reach; for she had allowed him to go so far that she feared he might insist on going one step farther. This was not all. She was well aware that Arundel Lifton was watching her with stern amusement, and she was delighted to place herself beyond his reach—beyond his knowledge. This at least she hoped to have done. Yet behind that eight-foot wall with its *chevaux-de-frise* she sometimes trembled a little at the thought of being discovered by Arundel Lifton. She had such a dread of his omniscience.

He, on the other hand, could she but have known it, was rather puzzled and annoyed by her disappearance. He had intended an awkward imbroglio betwixt her and Lord Arun, when behold, she suddenly vanishes, and Arun, who is perfectly truthful and transparent, has not the remotest idea what has become of her. Indeed, he bemoans his fate pertinaciously to Lifton, and Lifton gets very tired of him.

"She promised she'd write to me," Arun says, in Lifton's snug Albany chambers, where he comes for advice and consolation. "I say, Arundel—Paris, you know, by Jove, it's such

a dangerous place—don't you think something may have happened to her?"

"Of course I do. She has found somebody more amusing than you—though that would be difficult."

"Now do be serious, old fellow."

"Serious! With you? My dear boy, you're a perennial farce—only you carry your comic vein too far now and then. What says the poet?—

> "Lord! 'tis the most infernal bore,
> Of all the bores I know,
> To have a friend who's lost his heart
> A short time ago."

"I suppose that's Shakespeare," said Arun; "I've heard something very like it before, but I think there was a gipsy in it. I'll tell you what, Arundel—don't you see? this won't do. I shall run over to Paris; it's not such a big place—I shall soon find her. She's too pretty not to be known."

"Pshaw!" said Lifton. "Better far forget all about her. Stay here, go to the House, marry some woman in our own set, with a style that will do you credit. It's absurd, with your name and property, for you to be running after a wild creature like this, just as if she were a fit person to be Lady Arun. Marry sensibly. You couldn't have a finer woman than Sarum's daughter."

"Fine woman! Now if there's anything I hate, you see, it's that sort of creature—cart-horse style, don't you know? Yes, and she's, what d'ye call it?—a howler; goes and reads papers about things I never heard of—astronomy and gastronomy and botany and phlebotomy—and moves votes of thanks to herself. I don't see it, thank you, Arundel. You're as cold-blooded, don't you know? as the Old Serpent, whoever he was. Good-bye."

"*Au revoir*," said Lifton. "Write and tell me if you find her. She'll have got hold of somebody else, and refuse to give him up unless you promise to marry her. Don't be such an awful fool as that."

"I'd marry her this minute if she'd let me," said the impetuous youth, rushing away without another word. Arundel Lifton smiled grimly, thinking of many things.

Thus, while Lord Arun was execrating the tardy pace at which it seemed to him the steamer travelled, Flora Trevor was hidden away behind that lofty wall at Rowell St. Dunstan. The change pleased her. The carefully enclosed garden had

plentiful turf, brilliant flower-beds, large bird-haunted trees. In this quietude she buried herself, and seemed for the time perfectly content, to the amazement of restless Estelle. But Flora's temperament, though impulsive, was intensely lazy. She became vicious rather through indolence. It was too much trouble to resist temptation.

Flora did not stir outside the walls of her well-guarded garden. She left Estelle to manage the servants, who were old-fashioned and quiet. There was a pony-carriage on the premises, but she was not tempted to drive. She did not go to the old church dedicated to St. Dunstan, and never saw the noble east window in which the great prelate is depicted, red-hot tongs in hand, seizing the horny proboscis of the frightened fiend. The rector called, as in duty bound, but saw no one save Estelle, from whose rather bewildered excuses he concluded his new parishioner was not quite sane.

As to Estelle, she wandered out at intervals in the long lonely village street, and did the requisite shopping, and saw no bucolic hero worthy of assault.

"I am tired of this," she thought. "Brighton was better. The Great British farmer is a mistake."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FORNCETT'S DINNER PARTY.

ALOUETTE. Surely the Emperor is too old for love, papa,
And yet he weds the girlish Countess Isola.
ASTROLOGOS. Hush! whisper not that Emperors can e'er grow old!
At any rate, Love cannot. In the granite rocks
Fire dwells, and often here are hidden water springs,
And the most delicate flowers and mosses cover them.

The Comedy of Dreams.

"THE master's a-coming out, Mr. Ralph," said the cook at The Birches, when Ralph made an order for dinner for five. "I began to think I was never to have any cooking to do worth speaking of, though it's something to do to please you, Mr. Ralph; you know it is."

"Oh! you needn't be counting on nothing to do, Mary; for I daresay we shall be having his lordship here soon, and the young lord. And though the old gentleman's quiet enough, the young one must have everything tip-top. You'll have to look sharp then."

"And who is coming to-morrow night?" said the cook.

"Only some neighbours," said Ralph; "the author and his wife, and Mr. and Miss Temple."

"Oh, that is the pretty young lady. Perhaps master 'll go falling in love with her."

"Now, none of your nonsense, Mary," said Ralph, rather sharply, for this was a sore subject, as he thought there was something wrong with his master on this point; "your head is always going on love and marriage, Mary. The master and I have been about together for many years now, and we've neither of us any thoughts of marrying, thank God!"

"Really, Mr. Ralph, you're very sharp on me, and you speak of us poor women as if we was to be avoided like snakes. But, there! them that is so high and mighty is generally took in at last, and mostly by widows. I can't a-bear to see the way the widows go after the men, a-taking away the chances of us gals."

"Don't call yourself a girl, do you?" said Ralph.

"My age is nothing to you, sir," said Mary, getting angry. "And," she continued, getting bold in her anger, "you've no call to boast of you and the master not being in love, for I'll swear the master is. We poor women you despise so can see farther than you men; and it's no good to tell me the master ain't in love. I can see all about it. Why, if ever I wants a bit of a walk, and thinks I shall be out of sight just going round behind the trees there, I meet the master as sure as fate trampsing up and down, and looking so unhappy-like; and why should he choose that bit of walk but to see the young lady opposite?"

"And why should you choose it, but to look out in the road, and spy what is going on, and see the young men passing?"

"And why shouldn't I look at a young man now and then, Mr. Ralph? You can't expect me always to be content with seeing nothing but the cabbages in the kitchen-garden."

"Well, Mary, I don't suppose you mean any harm," said Ralph, rather softly; "but it isn't your business to go talking of your master in that way. It don't so much matter what you say to me, but just keep you your tongue in your head, my girl, so far as other people are concerned."

"All right, Mr. Ralph: you may trust me for knowing when to speak and when to shut up."

"Yes, Mary, I know you're a good little woman; and when we go away for the shooting in the autumn, I shall be quite comfortable at leaving you in charge of the place."

This little speech, intended for a compliment to Mary, did not seem to have the desired effect, for she looked sad, and said,

"Ah! we don't know what may happen before the autumn, Mr. Ralph."

Ralph left the kitchen looking very miserable. The idea of his master ever marrying was his greatest trouble. He cared for no one in the world except Mr. Forncett: he may be said almost to have worshipped him. He would certainly not have considered it right to hold any religious belief apart from him. Wherever his master was going in the next world, he must go with him. His master believed in God, and he believed in his master; that was sufficient for him. But what if a woman came between them? That was a dreadful idea. And all these years, while they had been knocking about together in all parts of the world, Mr. Forncett had shown no sign of falling in love. "It's very hard," thought Ralph, "that we no sooner come to a little place like this than master's head must be upset, and all about that little girl. I'm afraid it is too true. Perhaps the shooting will cure him."

Ralph had hardened from circumstances—not precisely into a misogynist, for he thought women useful enough in their way, and valuable contributors to comfort, amusement, and ornament—but rather into a woman despiser. Without having read the Koran, he shared the opinion of the False Prophet that they have no souls worth speaking of. So, when it seemed to him that his master, for whom he had the affection of an old-fashioned servitor, was likely to be entrapped by a flighty little thing like Miss Temple, he was naturally both alarmed and disgusted.

His attachment to Forncett was in some degree connected with his experience of women. A smart young fellow he had been in his time; and when in his first situation as footman, in a large country house in Devonshire, he had won the heart of a pretty lady's maid, no giantess of the west, but a little gay creature of Nottinghamshire birth, who had first seen service in the Dukeries. She set her cap at tall, soldier-like Ralph with remarkable assiduity: he soon surrendered at discretion, and grew to idolize her. "All went merry as a marriage bell," and Ralph lived for months in a fool's paradise. They were to wed in due time. Ralph had become so useful and so trusted that his master had promised to make him butler, and to give him a cottage on the estate.

He was on a pinnacle of happiness, and looked forward to a life of honourable labour and of happy love.

The house was growing full for the shooting season, and among the arrivals was Lord Arthur Elvet, from Elvet Hall, Nottinghamshire—a younger son, a boy of eighteen, beautiful as Adonis. Ralph noticed that his Emma first turned white, and then blushed, when Lord Arthur's coming was mentioned; but he merely connected these slight signs of emotion with the exclamation of a sharp-tongued maid, not famous for personal attraction, who said,

"Why, Emma, Elvet Hall is where you used to be. What sort of a gentleman is Lord Arthur?"

"Oh! he is no more than a boy," cried Emma, scornfully. And as she was probably six or seven years his senior, the remark was justified.

But it was soon obvious to the servants' hall that the boy in question was a precocious youth, and that he and Emma had been assisting in educating each other two years before at Elvet Hall. Ralph, the person most concerned, was of course the last to discover anything; for Emma, who had generally been fond of teasing him, and trying his temper a little, was at this time as sweet as honey. He suspected nothing, though all the others were laughing at his blindness, till one day, being sent suddenly on a message to his mistress, who was in the conservatories, he made a short cut across a retired part of the gardens, and saw Lord Arthur and the fickle lady's-maid alone in a quiet arbour. They saw him also. Emma sprang from her seat to run away; but Lord Arthur held her by the waist, saying, with intent that Ralph should hear it,

"What is the fellow to you?"

Ralph said nothing. He grieved silently. But somebody spoke: Emma was sent away by the housekeeper; and neither the master nor mistress of the house deemed it necessary to rebuke Lord Arthur for his flagrant breach of the laws which govern hospitality among English ladies and gentlemen. As for him, being elegantly chaffed by some of his friends, he remarked,

"Deuced shame to send her away. She's a nice amusing little thing."

So Emma was forgotten—by everyone save Ralph.

Soon after his departure, Frank Forncett came on a brief visit. He had just received the heavy blow from which time brought no recovery, and had determined to travel. He was

an intuitive physiognomist, and something about Ralph's face attracted him.

"I wish you could spare that man of yours to travel with me," he said: "I like his looks."

"You are welcome to him," replied the master of the house. "I hope he won't prove a failure. He was a capital servant, and I meant to make him butler; but he was fool enough to fall in love with a flighty little maid-servant, and she threw him over for somebody else, and the disappointment has made him stupid."

In this way did Ralph become "fidus Achates" to Frank Forncett. There was a kind of tacit sympathy between them, which after years of travel mellowed into that friendship between master and servant which is in these days so rare. Considering the history of that friendship, it was no wonder that Ralph felt jealous when there seemed a chance of his master being the victim of a woman, after all.

He determined to watch him carefully during the dinner at which Kate Temple would be present, and he imagined that he would be able easily to judge whether there was any cause for his anxiety.

Now it so happened that when Kate, dressed for dinner, went to show herself to Leonora for approval, Leonora remarked, "Yes, my dear girl, you look all that your father could wish; and now I want you to be pleasant to Mr. Forncett, and talk to him as much as you can. You will please me if you will do your best to be amiable to him; and tell me afterwards exactly what you think of him."

"Yes, mamma," said Kate. But her face suddenly lost its brightness. "What can mamma mean?" she thought, and a vision of Jack rose up before her, and she wondered whether her father was arranging a marriage with Mr. Forncett for her. Before she knew Jack such an idea would not have occurred to her; but now that Jack was always first in her thoughts she connected everything with him. She was even ready to be deceitful for Jack's sake, as he had been for hers, and she put on a forced expression of cheerfulness lest Leonora should read her thoughts.

At dinner she was placed by Mr. Frowde, and talked merrily to him, and even Ralph's jealous eyes could detect nothing.

But after dinner she sat with Mr. Forncett on a couch, and to judge from her animated expression she was carrying out Leonora's instruction.

Ralph brought in the tea and coffee, and was so clumsy in

his management of the tray that he attracted his master's attention.

"Why, Ralph," he said, "if you, the most careful of men, are clumsy, I shall think the skies will fall."

However, Ralph's mind was somewhat relieved before the end of the evening.

When the guests were going away, Mr. Forncett was in the hall, giving Kate some messages for Leonora.

"Well," thought Ralph, "I can see it is all right in that quarter; and there can't be anything up with Mrs. Temple, because she's married: but there's a mystery somewhere. And then she evidently knew him before I did, from the message he sent her."

This was a bitter thought, as Ralph adored his master to such an extent that he was jealous of everyone who had known him before.

When Kate returned home she found Leonora waiting for her.

"I didn't think it worth while to keep Lisette up, as I could not tell how late you would be, so I will help you to undress, Kate."

"Oh, I can manage, thank you, mamma."

"I might as well help you, child," said Leonora, calmly, though her heart was beating fast with anxiety to hear what Kate had to say of Frank Forncett.

Kate was full of excitement.

"Oh, mamma!" she said, as soon as they were upstairs alone, "I like Mr. Forncett so much! Why didn't you tell me you knew him?"

"Because I only found it out a short time ago," she replied.

Kate went running on in praise of Mr. Forncett. Presently she said:

"He is such a good noble man: he ought to have a beautiful good wife to love him and admire him. Do you know, mamma, there is only one woman I have ever seen that seems good enough for him."

"Who is that, Kate?"

"Why, you, of course."

"Oh, you little goose," said Leonora, "go to sleep;" and she kissed her and was leaving the room.

"Mamma!" said Kate softly.

"Yes," said Leonora, with her hand on the handle of the door.

"Do come here a minute. I want to whisper something; come very close to the bed."

"Yes, child; what is it?"

"Did you once love Mr. Forncett?"

"Yes, darling."

They held hands for a moment silently, then Leonora left the room. If she had stayed another five minutes the whole secret about Jack would have been out, and trouble to come caused by mischief-making tongues would have been saved.

But the calm and heroic Leonora could contain her feelings no longer, and she wanted to be alone to give way to them. She was too much agitated for it to occur to her that Kate would hardly have been so discerning or so sympathetic unless she knew herself what love was.

Kate tossed about in bed, perplexed with many thoughts. She longed for sympathy; and she was half inclined to get out of bed and go to Leonora's room and sympathize with her, and tell her about Jack. Then she remembered that Jack wished her to keep the secret, and it was not for long. Then she wondered what had separated Leonora and Mr. Forncett; and she thought that, if anything should ever part her from Jack, she could not bear it as Leonora did, but it would kill her. Then she thought of the difference between Leonora and herself, and Jack and Mr. Forncett. She thought Mr. Forncett a great man, who would be above trouble, as Leonora was. But she thought of Jack as perfect, but not a great man. "And I don't want him to be great, or he wouldn't match me," she said to herself. At last she fell asleep. When she awoke next morning she had no longer any great desire to get rid of her secret about Jack, but she felt a relief in knowing that there was someone who understood what love meant. Young people when they fall in love are apt to forget that their parents have (let us hope) passed through the same sort of experience, and they are afraid they will get no sympathy.

Perhaps the parents themselves sometimes forget what happened so long ago, and have no sympathy to give. But Kate now realized that Leonora once loved, and was still beloved.

Leonora felt Kate's sympathy in every action and look, yet it did not occur to her that there was any special reason for such sympathy. At least, not yet.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOOD INTENTIONS.

RAFAEL (*reading a letter*). The Count means well, Astrologos.
ASTROLOGOS. Often we find well-meaning men most mischievous.
He means well who means nothing—that's the worst of it—
Who aims to do the right, but cannot see the right,
Whose will is warped by the first gust of circumstance.
The Comedy of Dreams.

SUMMER passed on, with its cool splendour of sunrises—each a new gift of beauty from the Almighty Artist who has never painted twice alike—with its ever-changeful sunsets and cool twilights, delicious after the too sultry magnificence of noon—and Jack Sebright, doing work that he disliked under the guidance of the Rev. Dr. Sutton, could only dream of the indescribable loveliness which brooded on Copse Hill. To Jack's mind there was no perfect summer possible anywhere save at Copse Hill, for there Kate Temple dwelt. There was heat, of course, and sunlight; there were flowers and trees in other insignificant places; but only on the very centre of the world would Apollo shower the cream of his delight—the fiery luxury of his summer joy. And the centre of the world was where one gay young girl—often described by her critics as "plain," "flighty," "forward," and many other depreciative epithets—lived a happy life, and did not quite forget Jack Sebright.

Hard upon Jack, was it not? to be exiled in a London suburb at the leafiest season of the year—when all the roses were in full bloom (and Copse Hill is a place much loved by the Queen of Flowers)—when the lime alley was impenetrable, and the pigeons cooed incessantly, and the only unpleasant noise was from a gun in some neighbouring cherry orchard, whose owner expended more powder in frightening birds from the cherries than the cherries (a poor sort) would ever pay for. Jack, with a folio before him, and the bland stately form of the reverend doctor at the other end of the library, was wont to sit where he could see a quiet suburban garden, with turf and a sun-dial, and a tame raven stalking up and down—a raven that had been a real solace to Jack;—for when, in idle moments, Jack went into the garden and talked to that raven, that old bird turned on him his keen tawny eye, and seemed to understand every word he said. Jack and the raven

were great friends; and I take that to be very gracious of the raven, a prince among birds, who might well have declined to associate with a youngster about a fourth his own age and a millionth his experience. That raven's name was Peter; he had belonged to Dr. Sutton's predecessor in the house, and had declined to leave it when that gentleman went elsewhere. Peter was not at all on good terms with Dr. Sutton, whom he clearly deemed an intruder; and he always regarded himself as true owner of the premises. However, he patronized Jack.

It was one of those summers in which opponent forces meet. The noon of the year brought both stimulus and languor. At such times you feel you can do anything—you desire to do nothing. Only predominant passions have real power at such periods: these strong summers develop lovers and patriots. Under their electric influence boys and nations assert their manhood. I am afraid that in Jack Sebright's case the summer stimulus acted on his love—the summer languor on his theologic studies. But the Rev. Dr. Sutton was not hard upon him. He felt certain no examining chaplain would pluck a son of Marston Sebright, coached by Onesimus Sutton, S.T.P.

Notwithstanding the consolation of Peter, the time passed heavily with Jack Sebright. Dr. Sutton was so wearily wise, and he had only just grown acquainted with people who were quite as wise as the reverend doctor, but who mingled their wisdom with wit. Jack fancied he found much platitude and fallacy in the doctor's magniloquent prelections: he thought he had heard eternal truths more clearly stated on Manly Frowde's lawn; he began to hate the idea of taking his theology more as a profession than a faith. Jack was too sincere.

Yet was he not without pleasant news of his lady love. Mrs. Frowde, though she had multitudinous engagements—for she helped her husband in his work, and acted as his secretary, and yet kept her house and garden in charming order—was too kind not to write Jack a letter of gossip now and then. Indeed, she saw that he was just the fine young fellow who would profit from the correspondence of a married lady. She described to him Kate Temple, singing joyously on the lawn in the happy afternoons, mocking a nightingale that sang madly all day in a beech-tree on the common outside. She pictured her delight when a brown squirrel scampered across the lawn, and ran like lightning up the straight stem of a larch, and sprang into the boughs of a wild

cherry, where he sat, grave as judge on bench or parson in pulpit, looking down upon the folk below him, and eating his fruit with all the more enjoyment that the bipeds beneath had no chance of any. She usually mentioned Kate Temple in her letters: whether this was cruel or kind let us leave to the casuistry of love.

However, Mrs. Frowde's kindly notes—together with the advice he received from the venerable raven, Peter—kept Jack from rebelling against Dr. Sutton's hermeneutics. We regret that Jack, who had a talent for caricature, which the Church should discourage in those who aspire to be its servants, sent Mrs. Frowde portraits of Dr. Onesimus Sutton which did not arouse reverence. It is to be feared that Jack was unfair to his kind tutor: else it is certain that the loftiness of Dr. Sutton's forehead was quite disproportionate to the shortness of his legs. However, we all know where the brain is to be found.

Kate, who by this time was quite at home with the Frowdes —much to the delight of her father and Leonora, who dreaded above all things that her happy childhood might be spoilt by her strange position—used to come through the wicket gate when she would, and talk to the birds and the dogs, and feel at home. She had found her way into the hearts of her friends. They saw in her a guileless girl, worthy of treading the same virgin turf that welcomed the fair feet of Shakespeare's Miranda and Rosalind; and when they also beheld in Jack Sebright just the sort of fellow that might have been Ferdinand or Orlando, they felt that the eternal Poem of Love, whose first lyric was sung in the Garden of the Four Rivers, was to be dramatised over again. So, feeling that no harm could come of such loyal intercourse, and intermingling a little humour with that intercourse, they did all they honourably could for the young lovers.

Kate sometimes wondered, when Mrs. Frowde chaffed her about Jack, whether she guessed her secret, and felt half inclined to tell her; but she always argued with herself that Jack wished her to be silent, and it would not be for long.

She had come to connect the Frowdes and their cottage so entirely with Jack that she found continual excuses for running in through the wicket gate, so that she scarcely passed a day without spending some time with Mrs. Frowde, until it occurred to her that she might seem to be neglecting her father. Therefore she sometimes punished herself by determining to keep away from the cottage for a whole day.

One afternoon while Kate was standing at Mrs. Frowde's desk, sending nonsensical messages to Jack, and wishing she could send earnest ones, the worthy Vicar of Copse Hill was trotting along the lanes towards Ashton Minima with intent to call on the Reverend Marston Sebright, Jack having genially suggested it. His horse was not a good one to look at—or to go; he hacked it in a curious gig that he kept, so high that Mrs. Voyd found it difficult to climb into it; but he was wont to say that such sublunary considerations were beneath the sacerdotal character. And who can gainsay it? He thought loftily of his vocation, but of himself humbly. Still in many matters he puzzled those who firmly believed in his sincerity of purpose. The vicar took twice as long to get to Ashton Minima as Jack on Bessie wanted for the reverse journey. The difference in the quality of their steeds was not the only reason. Jack begrudged every minute that he spent on the road, when he had a hope to see Kate at the end of it; but the vicar took his time, and reflected as he jogged along on the manifest improvement which he had happily effected in his parish in so short a period, and wondered whether the Rev. Marston Sebright was a clergyman of sympathetic disposition, and like-minded with himself.

He reached the rectory full of his best intentions. Mr. Sebright was at home, and received him courteously, and expressed his pleasure that an old friend of his son's was in the neighbourhood.

"He has at last made up his mind to take orders," said the rector, "and is reading with Sutton."

"A high privilege," said Voyd.

"Yes, Sutton has the modern theology at his fingers' ends. He has mastered all the German men, and might be trusted to draw up a perfect scheme of the orthodoxy of the hour—a thing most difficult, seeing how orthodoxy fluctuates. Whether my son will do credit to his tutor, it is hard to say; but he did well in mathematics, which he hates; and I hope he may do as well in theology, which I know he does not care about. Hatred is often a fine motive power."

Mr. Voyd did not quite follow his reverend brother, who, tall and spare, with long white hair, keen eyes under white eyebrows, eagle nose, a firm curved mouth, gesticulating with long talon-like fingers, was a picture Vandyck might have painted. It took the vicar some time to think what to say At length he remarked:

"I think my friend Mr. Sebright will throw his whole heart into parish work."

"I hope he will not," replied Marston Sebright, "if by parish work is understood prying into poor people's affairs, and patronizing them, and encouraging gossip, and doing charitable work that should be imposed on the pious women of the parish. It is terrible to think that just now that old cry, 'the Church is in danger,' might well be raised—not because politicians attack the Church, not because the people are disaffected to the Church, for they were never more loyal, but because the clergy, split into many sects on mere trivial points, are doing their utmost to destroy the Church. The laymen are our best defence. You have a parishioner—Frowde—who has done more for the parish by his writings than I and you together could ever hope to do."

"Is he orthodox?" asked Mr. Voyd.

"My dear sir, are you orthodox to-day? And, if you are quite sure of that, shall you be orthodox to-morrow. Theology is a science which cannot stand still: it is the knowledge of God, and every moment adds to that knowledge in some way. When I see the stolid way in which most of my contemporaries view the work they have in hand, I ask the question put to Ezekiel in the Valley of Vision, "Can these bones live?" I don't mean Jack to be a dry bone: his grandfather was a great prelate, a vigorous leader of the Church; and if Jack has not power to follow in his steps, I shall deeply regret his becoming a clergyman. But forgive me, I am talking too much of my only son—a father's fault. Here is Mrs. Sebright. Will you not have some luncheon?"

That quiet old lady had just entered the library, to say that luncheon was on the table. She liked My. Voyd—at first sight.

"I must ask you to excuse me," said the rector to Mr. Voyd. "Mrs. Sebright will do her best to entertain you, especially as you are a friend of our boy's, I have engaged to be over at Lord Manaton's at two, about a bill that we are both interested in; as it is, I fear I shall be late."

Indeed, the rector's dog-cart had been at the door for ten minutes, the horse impatiently pawing the gravel. Leaving his wife and Mr. Voyd to lunch together, he drove off at a fast trot, saying to himself,

"Puppy-parsons ruin the Church."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LOVE'S USUAL TROUBLES

ALOUETTE. "The course of true love never did run smooth," they say.
I want to know, papa, is false love fortunate?
ASTROLOGOS. Of all things on this earth the most unfortunate—
Annihilating souls. False love is hatred, child,
Ἐπίγειος, ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης:
In this the great Apostle of false wisdom spake—
And love is wisdom, or it is not love at all.—*The Comedy of Dreams.*

THE Reverend Vypar Voyd was not very favourably impressed with the Reverend Marston Sebright, so the good intentions with which he came laden remained unfulfilled. But a *tête-à-tête* luncheon with Mrs. Sebright seemed to give hopes of fulfilling them.

Mr. Voyd had a suasive manner, which women always admire in men, but which men do not admire in men.

Mrs. Sebright was essentially a womanly woman. She was shrewd in a certain way, but she was easily imposed upon. She would not tell a lie herself, so she believed all that was told her.

She had a proper reverence for the priestly office, and was a willing listener when anyone talked in praise of her son. Therefore she was the very person the vicar wanted at this moment.

After some general conversation she began—

"Then you saw a good deal of my son at Copse Hill?"

"Well, no, indeed, I much regret that I did not. It would have given me the greatest pleasure to see more of him, for I have a very pleasant remembrance of him at college: and really I think I may say I might have been of some use to him."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Sebright, "I thought he often went to see you."

"No," answered Mr. Voyd hesitatingly, as if he would indicate that he was perplexed whether he ought to say anything to Jack's disadvantage, and yet it was his duty to speak the truth—"No, I am sorry he did not call on me oftener, for I might have warned him before of becoming too intimate with dangerous characters."

"Good gracious! Mr. Voyd," said Mrs. Sebright, betrayed in her anxiety into the strongest expression she ever used, "you don't mean to say my boy associated with dangerous

people? He knew no one but Mr. Frowde, and I have heard my husband speak in the highest terms of Mr. Frowde."

"My dear lady, I am afraid Mr. Sebright is very much mistaken in Mr. Frowde. You see, I know him personally, and I can assure you that Mr. Frowde is a most dangerous character."

"But how?" said Mrs. Sebright, looking very anxious.

"In every way I consider him a bad man—a *very* bad man; and it grieved me to the heart to see my old friend so intimate with him;" and Mr. Voyd's tone became almost lachrymose.

"Are you sure of this, Mr. Voyd?"

"I am sure you need not doubt *me*, Mrs. Sebright," and he looked at her in his most suasive manner. Mrs. Sebright was mechanically crumbling up the piece of bread by her plate and looking very miserable. She did not doubt Mr. Voyd, and she now began to recall incidents which in her mind confirmed what he said.

"Now I remember," she said, "how very anxious Jack was that I should never go to call on Mrs. Frowde. Of course, he did not want me to see them. Is Mrs. Frowde as bad as her husband?"

"Quite so, I am afraid," said the Vicar, shaking his head solemnly. "Indeed, I often feel that with a good woman there might be some hope for poor Mr. Frowde, whom I pity very much—I really pity him; but with such a woman as Mrs. Frowde, who joins him and encourages him in everything he does, there is no hope for him—no hope," and he shook his head more solemnly than ever.

"My son never did care to associate with bad people," said Mrs. Sebright; "so I suppose there is some peculiar fascination in the Frowdes?"

"Mr. Frowde is considered to be a man of genius, and such men are, I believe, fascinating to some people. I was myself fortunately—most fortunately—warned against him by my wife's parents, though I do not think I should in any case have admired him; but I am sorry to say that some of my parishioners are led away—completely led away—by him." Mr. Voyd had a habit of emphasizing his sentences by repeating some particular word with the addition of an adjective or adverb. "The fascination of his genius," he continued, "makes him the more dangerous."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Sebright, "what is to be done to prevent Jack from seeing those people again?" She had so thoroughly persuaded herself of the badness of the Frowdes

that she already hated them, and began to think of them as "*these people.*"

"It might be easily managed," said Mr. Voyd, "but there is, I am afraid, more mischief behind. I really feel, my dear Mrs. Sebright, that I may perhaps, in my great regard for your son, be causing you much unhappiness; but I can assure you I do it with the hope of doing good in the end. And if I can be of any service to you in reclaiming your son from the vicious company into which he has lately got, I shall be glad —very glad."

"Do, please, tell me everything, Mr. Voyd, and you will win my everlasting gratitude; for my son is everything to me, and if he were to disgrace his family I could not outlive it. You don't know how much I suffered before he went away because of the change I observed in him, though I little guessed the true cause. Pray tell me everything."

"Your son has, I am afraid, made very undesirable acquaintances at Mr. Frowde's house," said Mr. Voyd, proceeding cautiously.

"Yes," said Mrs. Sebright.

"One, a Mr. Forncett, is, I should think, from the little I have seen and heard of him, a pagan—a thorough pagan; and I am sure you will agree with me that such a man is dangerous to one like your son, who has scarcely settled views of religion."

"Certainly, very dangerous."

"Then there's a family called Temple, who, from all I can gather, are not reputable people. Mr. Temple and his daughter certainly attend church sometimes; but I am afraid there is reason—good reason—to suppose that he is not living reputably with the person called Mrs. Temple."

"Good gracious! Mr. Voyd. And did those people introduce my dear boy to anyone so disreputable?"

"Yes, and not only that, my dear lady, but"—and he lowered his voice as he came to the climax of Jack's crimes, and leaned across the table to Mrs. Sebright—"he is, I am afraid, entangled in some way with Miss Temple."

"Oh, Mr. Voyd!" said Mrs. Sebright, bursting into tears, "what shall I do? I could not have believed Jack would ever have behaved so badly to me."

"Pray calm yourself, my dear Mrs. Sebright, and let us think what can be done. Do not blame your son: it is not his fault. He has been led into it all by the Frowdes. Perhaps we may yet save him further trouble."

"What can we do?" said Mrs. Sebright, imploringly, looking to Mr. Voyd as her deliverer. "Hadn't you better see his father?"

"N—o," said Mr. Voyd, who did not care for another interview with Mr. Marston Sebright, "I think, if you will allow me to make a suggestion, I should say it would be best to keep the matter entirely secret from his father: there is no knowing how angry he might be. I think if you will leave the matter to me, Mrs. Sebright, I may, with your help, be able to do something. But we must be quiet for the present, till I can hear something more certain concerning the Temple family. I am making inquiries everywhere. Your son will not be home yet, you say, so we have time."

"I am sure I can never thank you enough, my dear Mr. Voyd—you have made me your debtor for life."

"I hope I may deserve your gratitude. I really think it will be best—decidedly best—not to mention the matter to your husband at present."

The Rev. Vypar Voyd rode home again, congratulating himself that he had done a kind and priestly action.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHEEP AND GOATS.

ALOUETTE. Papa, the cardinal-legate's sermon puzzled me.
Which are the sheep and which the goats, I want to know?
I think a goat upon a mountain pinnacle
Is happier than a sheep in heavy meadow land.
ASTROLOGOS. Heaven's Zodiac hath both Capricorn and Aries.
The spiritual Zodiac is not narrower.—*The Comedy of Dreams.*

COPSE HILL soon began to show results of the vicar's attempts at reform. There certainly were some hardened sinners who declined to be reformed, and who were wont to laugh at the vicar's good intentions. There were others who expressed their opinion that "too many of old Uriah's ways were introduced into the parish," for the Rev. Uriah Urgent was not a universal favourite. But leaving these bad people out of the question, there was a decided change in the behaviour of many of the villagers. The vicar's sermons were outspoken and earnest. Perhaps occasionally he was a little obscure when trying to explain the doctrines of the Church.

His doctrinal sermons showed signs of having been made up from the commentators, and in such a way as to present rather a hash of ideas; but he meant well, and was anxious that his flock should not miss the chance of salvation through ignorance of Church dogma.

But it was when his sermons had a moral tone that he pleased his audience. He so denounced bad people as to make those who prided themselves on being good feel very comfortable; in fact, he drew so hard and fast a line between good and bad, that there was little difficulty in discovering the sheep from the goats. And so into sheep and goats the village was very soon divided. It was done with the best intentions, but was, perhaps, scarcely a wise arrangement; the sheep were apt to think too much of their own goodness, and to look down on the goats. Still the goats had a chance held out to them of going over to the side of the sheep, for Mr. Voyd taught that the way to live virtuously was to go to church regularly and keep out of debt; and as it is of course very easy to do these things, there should have been no bad people in Mr. Voyd's flock. If there should happen to be any unfortunate man in Copse Hill who, though he attended church regularly, found his business matters did not run as smoothly as he could wish, Mr. Voyd's teachings may have had the effect of making him lose hope and become desperate. There are many of us who, from some deficiency in education or reasoning power, are unable to realize for ourselves the goodness of God, and such of us generally look to the parson for guidance, and take what he says for gospel.

But let us hope that all in Copse Hill—the church-goers, at least—paid their way and were prosperous, and went home to their Sunday dinner with the comfortable feeling that they were the sheep of the parish, and that they could look with scorn and pity on their neighbours the goats.

This division of the people led in time to a general appearance of priggishness and straightlacedness in the village. The good people looked so very good, and began to what is vulgarly termed "cut" the bad people. Instead of the friendly greetings which passed formerly between neighbours, there were stiff nods, or no greeting at all. People who had given the time of day to each other and talked learnedly on the weather for a dozen or two of years, now passed with a nod and grunt, or perhaps with no mark of recognition. There was a general cautiousness. People looked at each other with an expression that meant, "I wonder whether you owe anyone

anything; because, if you do, I shall have nothing to say to you."

Miss Tattleton and Mr. Biggins were great favourites with the vicar, so it is to be presumed that they were very prosperous in business, and owed no man anything. 'Tis true that Biggins did not carry out the vicar's other commandment, for he had never entered a church for very many years. Miss Tattleton went more regularly than she had been accustomed to do in Mr. Bonfellow's time, and even sacrificed some time from her business on saints' days, and in Lent, that she might please Mr. Voyd. Some of Mr. Voyd's enemies (and the best of men have enemies) declared that he was friendly with the occupants of the inn and the shop because he made them instruments for picking up gossip; but if there were any truth in it, Mr. Voyd did it with good intentions, for he thought this justifiable to find out the faults of his parishioners, in order to be better able to correct them.

This method of managing a parish has its disadvantages. A parson has great power. He is the dispenser of the parish charities and alms and Christmas gifts. Those who want help must take care to keep friendly with him. If he is fond of gossip, plenty will be found for him, and if he is known to dislike certain people, he can hear those people abused to his heart's content.

Most parsons have some women helpers in the parish—women who either have not or cannot find interest in their own homes. Women of this sort are sometimes of immense use, and sometimes do infinite harm. We have known such who have made their own homes one continual scene of discord through their ill-temper, and yet in parish work have been most useful and energetic. Their energy, which is spent in ill-temper at home, is directed into a useful channel in the parish.

Mr. Voyd was not without helpers. One lady had devoted many years of her life to the parish work in Copse Hill. She had been looked upon as an honourable and good woman, who worked in singleness of heart, and scorned meanness and gossip. But the casuistry of the Rev. Vypar Voyd seemed to change her completely. Her duty to the vicar soon became her sole aim, and to further his views she spent a considerable time in gossip at the village shop and elsewhere. She even condescended to question people's servants, when information was wanted. No doubt she argued with herself that she could not be doing wrong, because she was only carrying out

the vicar's work; but, unfortunately, gossip is a pastime that grows upon one, and she soon came to love it for its own sake. What she heard in cottages and at the village shop she carried, with a few additions and embellishments, into the drawing-rooms, and created a love of scandal where perhaps it had not previously existed. So in time there was quite a gossip fever in the place—an endemic of gossip—and all through the little mistake of a very well-intentioned young man.

Another little mistake which the vicar made—and it was made quite unconsciously—was dividing the people too distinctly into upper and lower classes. There may be some fairness in separating the good from the bad: for the bad have a chance of becoming good if they like, but the lower classes have little chance of becoming the upper classes. Now, the Reverend Vypar Voyd, so far from doing this intentionally, prided himself on his affability to what he termed the lower classes. He put on his blandest manner in speaking to them; but the very fact of his putting on a manner showed he made the distinction. He did not talk to them naturally. They felt this, and it helped to make a wider gap between them and their richer neighbours. This increased the general feeling of distrust which the division into good and bad people had made.

With the upper classes, as Mr. Voyd termed them, he was not so successful as he could have wished. There was certainly a good deal of room for reform amongst some of them, but he made no signs of undertaking it. Perhaps he saw no fault in them, as, being rich, they could pay their way, and most of them attended church regularly.

Squire Perivale, for instance, was in the vicar's eyes a good man—a very good man, the vicar would say. He attended church regularly, and looked most venerable and pious. He listened attentively to every part of the service. He gave liberally to the various parish subscriptions. He lived in a beautiful house, magnificently furnished. He had many conservatories, wherein he grew the choicest fruits and flowers. He gave periodical dinner-parties, where everything but the wit was of first-rate quality. He occupied a respectable position in society, being a director on several boards, or what is commonly called a "guinea pig." This man has not a fault, the world and the Reverend Vypar Voyd will say.

He and his wife have a beautiful big house containing many rooms, and surrounded by many acres of pleasure-ground, all for their own enjoyment, with notice to trepassers at every

corner; whereas opposite his gates there are cottages belonging to him in the most wretched condition, in some of which families are so crowded together that several people must sleep in one very small room But this troubles not the good man's peace of mind. The cottages are not a paying property, and he cannot be expected to give up any of his luxurious surroundings to better the condition of his tenants. So he drives through his gates in a comfortable carriage, behind valuable horses, regardless of the state of the cottages and their occupants on the other side of the road. What is it to him if the overcrowding of human beings in a cottage is destructive of decency and morality? But he may be said to be not altogether regardless of the state of his tenants, for he once turned out a family because the father was committed to gaol for stealing a piece of bacon. Of course this was only right, though the family would have to live on somebody's land, if not on Mr. Perivale's; but there are tiresome people, with a stern idea of justice, who would say that it is a far greater crime in a rich man to neglect the condition of the people on his estate than it is for a poor man to steal a bit of bacon. Holders of land are simply stewards of the land they hold, and are responsible for the condition of those living on it. The land belongs to the people.

But leaving the cottages out of the question, as Mr. Perivale himself did, he was a good man. He was a shining light in Mr. Voyd's flock. In his overpowering sense of goodness, he might perhaps be too apt to look with scorn on some of the bad people—on that scapegoat Frowde, for instance, when he appeared in a brown-holland coat, or what was worse, in his shirt-sleeves: a shade of horror would then pass over the good man's face, and a shrug would be seen in the broadcloth-covered shoulders 'Tis not every *gentlemanly* fellow that can afford to be seen in blouse or shirt-sleeves, but every *manly* fellow can.

Notwithstanding the great reformation in the village, there was a general regret for and looking back to the time when Mr. Bonfellow was vicar. There had been plenty of fault found with him in the old days, but somehow everyone seemed to have forgotten the faults and remembered the virtues. Expressions of regret and praise were continually used concerning him, both by "upper classes" and "lower classes," and by "sheep" and "goats." It was the one subject on which there was no division in the parish.

"What a dear good man he was," said one.

"What a gentleman," said another.

"He was kind to everyone alike," said a third; and Miss Tattleton was heard to say, "I saw that dear old Dick when I was out in the cart to-day with the bread; and if there hadn't been a hedge between us, I think I must have jumped down and hugged him, I was so glad to see him." As "dear old Dick" quite understood the character of Miss Tattleton, he would not have been offended if he had heard this remark. Perhaps the secret of Mr. Bonfellow's popularity was that he was so *human*. He did not raise himself on a lofty pedestal, and then denounce everyone below him. Indeed, he thought too little of himself. He was too tender-hearted to take the very severe view of religion, and threaten all sorts of horrible punishments. Tender-hearted people are generally brave and true, and Mr. Bonfellow was a brave and true man. No doubt we were very bad people in Mr. Bonfellow's time, or there would not have been so much room for improvement by Mr. Voyd; but if we were bad we did not know it. We never pointed at one another and looked at each other with distrust, as we do now; for somehow, Mr. Bonfellow brought out the best side of all of us, and made us think well of ourselves and our neighbours too. Then there was Mrs. Bonfellow—a kind, sensible, useful little lady, with the pleasantest face; and a flock of little Bonfellows, who, with their nursemaids, pervaded the village, and were welcomed by every one. When they all disappeared it seemed as if the poetry of the place had departed. Mr. Bonfellow, however, had not gone very far away.

Kate Temple was one day riding out with her father when she met Mr. and Mrs. Frowde just by Mr. Bonfellow's house. The conversation fell on Mr. Bonfellow's goodness, a favourite subject with the Frowdes.

Mrs. Frowde was describing the happy state of things in Copse Hill, when he was vicar. "We are all being divided into good and bad people now," said Mrs. Frowde, "and Manly and I belong to the bad, Kate. I hope you won't think it necessary to 'cut' us."

"Yes," said Manly Frowde, "several people have cut me already, and they look quite angry when we pass because their dogs won't cut ours. It is very undiscerning of a good man's dog not to know when he meets a bad man's dog. You'll be cutting me soon, Temple, for you are sure to be classed with the good people, as you are rich."

"I am afraid it may be rather the other way; for I don't

think our good vicar quite liked my treatment of him when he called. I found him too inquisitive to please me. However, he will have no chance just now of placing me either amongst good or bad; for we are going away for about a month to Windermere."

At this moment Mr. Bonfellow came out of his gate, and was introduced to Mr. Temple and Kate—with some difficulty, for he was carrying a large churchwarden's book, a small club book, and an umbrella, all in one hand, the other hand being entirely devoted to a basket of good things for an invalid, which he had been instructed by good Mrs. Bonfellow to carry most carefully.

"What a gentleman he is!" said Kate, when Mr. Bonfellow had gone on; and they stood watching him. They saw a cart coming in the distance, being driven very fast, and occupied by three men from Copse Hill. The cart was pulled up suddenly as it drew near Mr. Bonfellow, and all the men lifted their hats with an expression of respect.

"There!" said Mrs. Frowde: "can't you see how those men worship Mr. Bonfellow? Why, the man who has the reins is the fastest driver in these parts, and never stops for anyone: he is one of what Mr. Voyd would call the bad people amongst us, and never goes to church. Our present vicar, with all his saintliness, will never command such respect as that."

"Thou shalt not speak evil of dignitaries," said Mr. Frowde.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SCANDALUM MAGNATUM.

RAFAEL. An oily plausible fellow came, Astrologos,
Up the back stairs by stealth to see me yesterday :
Aldeborontiphosciphornio brought him here—
The many-syllabled lordling.
ASTROLOGOS. And his business, Prince ?
RAFAEL. To vilify you. To hint that he had heard that you
Had done or said or thought things vile and treasonable,
That your proceedings were by no means orthodox,
That there were rumours all through Megalopolis
Of your most foul disloyalty and heresy.
ASTROLOGOS. Impalpable dust of slander fills the atmosphere,
And blinds the eyes and warps the husky throats of men :
But, when truth's sunshaft smite the air, at once you see
The small foul atoms of the dirt we tread upon.

The Comedy of Dreams.

To Ashton Minima one morning there came a note from Dr. Sutton, telling his friend Marston Sebright that for health's sake he was about to leave town for awhile, and to stay at a small place which he had on the banks of the Dart, not very far from Ashburton.

"I shall be delighted to take your son with me, my dear Sebright," went on the doctor. "It is a solitary place, you know ; but the air is lovely, and the scenery without anything to equal it that I have ever seen. I dare say he will work even harder at Holme Cottage than in London, and I know how eager you are that he should lose no time. If you agree in my plan write to him at once, as I am ordered to leave as soon as possible, and Mrs. Sebright would doubtless wish him to be at home for a few days."

Strange to say, Mrs. Sebright did not seem to wish it. She was delighted at the idea of his going into Devonshire, since it would remove him farther from the evil influence which attracted him to Copse Hill—a hill which, if the worthy old lady had known the legend of Tannhäuser, she would have thought was the fateful Venusberg removed to England. But, though she pined for a sight of her son's frank face and active figure, she was willing to sacrifice the delight of seeing him lest he should also see those dreadful Frowdes and Temples of whom the wise and thoughtful Vicar of Copse Hill had warned her. She could hardly oppose Jack's coming

home in definite terms; but she puzzled Marston Sebright by such sayings as that it did not seem necessary, it might unsettle him, and other discouraging phrases,

Jack's father, however, did not see it all in that light. He wanted to know how hermeneutics agreed with Jack. He accordingly made light of Mrs. Sebright's objections, which were rather hinted than outspoken, and wrote to Sutton approving the arrangement, and to his son, fixing an early day for his coming home.

Jack was in ecstasy. He rejoiced at the notion of going into Devonshire, a country quite unknown to him: for the strong spirit of man, in its restless and fearless youth, longs always for the unknown. True, it was farther from what was to him the centre of the world, the quiet village where his lady-love abode: but railways have abolished distance, and the additional two hundred miles were only four or five hours by express. And then he should have an unexpected meeting with Kate! Delirious thought! He would not let Mrs. Frowde know he was coming. He would ride Bessie over, and take his kind friends by surprise. He pictured to himself a lithe little figure tripping through the wicket gate under the heavy lime boughs, and bright eyes brightening, and pure cheeks sweetly flushing, when he was seen upon the lawn. He went and talked to the raven about it, for Jack *must* talk, even if only to himself.

"Peter, old boy, I am going to leave you. I shan't hear any more of your croaks for a long time, you old philosopher."

"Croak!" quoth Peter, with one eye on Jack and another on a pert cock-sparrow that he rather thought he should like for lunch. He had left a bit of his raw meat at an easy distance, just to tempt that sparrow.

"I'm going to see my sweetheart, Peter," said Jack, sitting on a log in the sunshine. "My sweetheart! My sweetheart!" He murmured the fond words rhythmically, and wished himself a poet. "Had you ever a sweetheart, Peter, when you were a young bird up in the Cumberland Hills—about the time of Henry VIII., I suppose? Now had you ever a sweetheart, Peter?"

"Croak! *Croak!* CROAK!" quoth Peter jubilantly.

A good omen for Jack, you will say: but the fact is Peter had caught that pert cock-sparrow, whose impudent chirping had a long time annoyed him, while his plumpness (caused by his stealing Peter's scraps) was very tempting. Peter's last croak was almost a scream.

"You old wretch!" said Jack. "It would serve you right if I took that sparrow away from you. You've got no sympathy. Come now, Peter, aren't you glad that I'm going to see my sweetheart?"

"Cro-o-o-o-ak!" said the raven, in so hopelessly depressing a way, that Jack arose and fled, thinking it was an evil omen —Macbeth says,

> "The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements."

But the prolonged and dismal croak which had appalled Jack Sebright was actually caused by Peter's having swallowed his sparrow so greedily that several bones stuck in his gullet.

Jack came home, and was received right royally, having the happy yet dangerous privilege of an only son. His parents thought he looked none the worse for theologic study in London. Mrs. Sebright was delighted to see that hermeneutics had not quelled her boy's Homeric appetite. The sirloin diminished before him; the healthy tankard pleased him more than wine. Marston Sebright had made up his mind to ask him a few questions as to his progress under Sutton—but not till the youngster had enjoyed a few days at home.

"You'll like to ride over and see your friends at Copse Hill, I suppose, Jack?" said Mr Sebright. "I rather like your having taken a fancy to Frowde: knowing men a little out of the common is a good thing for a clergyman, who for the most part has to deal with people as like one another as a flock of sheep. Why not ride over to-morrow? Bessie will be delighted."

"And not only Bessie," thought Jack.

"Not to-morrow," said Mrs. Sebright. "Knowing how fond you are of him, I have asked Mr. Voyd to come over to luncheon. So you must please postpone your visit to Mr. Frowde till the next day."

Mrs. Sebright laid a curious stress on the words *Mr. Frowde*, which simple-hearted Jack did not notice. He could not say to his mother, "Voyd be hanged!" The most innocent deception meets its punishment: he had used the vicar's name as an excuse for his frequent visits to Copse Hill, and now he was kept away a whole day from his Kate as a consequence of that harmless fraud. It was hard upon Jack, who could only acquiesce in silence.

"It is unlucky," said Marston Sebright, who had been puzzling himself as to how there could be any special liking between Mr. Voyd and his son, "that I cannot possibly be at home to meet your friend to-morrow. Perhaps you will enjoy his company all the more."

Jack's countenance did not at that moment indicate intense enjoyment. Mrs. Sebright was, however, well pleased with the state of affairs.

Breakfast next morning was rather dull. Jack's appetite was not so good as usual, a fact on which his mother had no heart to comment. The Rev. Marston Sebright had always so much on hand when the post came in that he was in the habit of breakfasting mechanically. That meal was always the same with him, summer and winter. One cup of tea from the Himalaya, one new-laid egg, one slice of dry toast, was his regular allowance. There was no affectation of abstemiousness and regularity about Marston Sebright; hew as a man of native moderation, and disliked excess of all kinds. As a Churchman, Coplestone himself could not have classified him: he was neither High nor Low nor Broad—had nothing in common with either Pusey or Close or Stanley. He was an English Churchman—neither more nor less. At this present time he had been rather amused, and perhaps a little irritated by a clerical mania for teetotalism, which had infected the neighbourhood. Being asked by a zealous curate to aid in the movement, he distinctly declined.

"Total abstinence is excess," he replied. "If it were necessary to temperance, yet remember that there are many things besides temperance which a minister of Christ should teach, and that by concentrating your efforts in one direction only you must leave the greater part of your duty unperformed. Be guided by the glorious catena of St. Peter: 'Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.'"

He gave the quotation in the original Greek, with too much rapidity for that zealous curate to follow him; and when the young priest was gone Marston Sebright said to himself:

"The apostle puts knowledge before temperance. These men are intemperate because they despise knowledge."

The digression may be excused as showing the character of our hero's father—a man by no means ideally perfect, but with strong yearnings for a perfection based on his own ideal,

Let us leave him for the present getting into his dog-cart, in which he drove a bay mare that trotted an easy fourteen miles without breaking, and saying goodbye to Jack with a hope that he and his friend would enjoy themselves together.

Poor Jack! He had Bessie out, told his mother he should be home in good time for lunch, and road off across wild common land, trying to blow away the unpleasant feelings that had come over him. It was not only that he was kept back for a day from seeing Kate: he had a kind of vague presentiment that there was something unpleasant in front of him. How disgusted he was that he had ever mentioned Voyd to his mother, or asked Voyd to call at Ashton Minima! Not that he disliked the vicar! he thought him one of the most admirable of clergymen; in all sincerity he hoped that he might do his duty half as well. Still there was not much in common between them; and he knew that there was a dreary afternoon before him. However, a brisk ride shook him into healthier form. Bessie was wild to feel her young master's nervous thighs upon her sides once more, and skimmed the hedges like a roe; and he shouted as he rode homeward,

"Never mind, Bessie, my pet! To-morrow we'll ride another way, and have a merry time."

He was only a quarter of an hour late, whereas the vicar had been more than that before his time, and had confidentially conversed with Mrs. Sebright. Jack, having recovered his spirits, received Mr. Voyd with frank cordiality, and luncheon went off quietly enough. Jack talked only of general subjects, and said nothing of his friends at Copse Hill. The vicar hardly knew how to begin: indeed, he hesitated so long that Mrs. Sebright lost patience, and came to his aid.

"Jack," said the old lady, "Mr. Voyd does not give me a very good account of some of the acquaintances you seem to have made at Copse Hill, about whom you have said little or nothing to me. As a future clergyman you must be careful. It is most fortunate you did not ride over to day."

"What does this mean?" said Jack, looking straight at Voyd, who did not look straight at him.

"I have been merely telling Mrs. Sebright," said the vicar, in a saintly voice, "that not only is Mr. Frowde an infidel, but that there are stains—yes, sad stains,—upon his moral character, which render it inexpedient—more than inexpedient—that anyone who desires to be unspotted from the world should visit him."

Jack was astounded by this sudden and savage attack. He grasped his tankard, and took a great gulp before he spoke. Then he said, trying to be calm,

"Tell me, Voyd, what is there against Frowde, and on whose authority you speak?"

"It would ill become a clergyman to indicate the sins, however glaring, of his parishioners: nor would it be right to mention the names of the excellent persons—excellent and most reliable—from whom he obtains information. It is the duty, the bounden duty, of a priest to warn, but never to circulate scandal. I cannot, therefore, my dear Sebright, do more than assure you that Mr. and Mrs Frowde—fascinating, intensely fascinating, as I hear their society is—are entirely unfit to be your associates."

"I don't at all understand this," said Jack Sebright angrily. "If it is part of a clergyman's duty to take away a man's character without giving a reason for it, I'll never take holy orders—unholy orders I should rather call them."

He rose from his chair, looking like a roused lion. He felt there was something false in all this. His fierce look frightened his mother, who thought she would settle the affair at once, and said,

"Be calm, dear Jack; do be calm. Mr. Voyd tells you this with the kindest of motives. He has something to say to you also of a family you never mentioned to me—for good reason, I fear"—she said, with a sigh—"the Temples."

A shudder of rage ran through Jack's form. He could have strangled the vicar, who looked at him from the opposite side of the table with a pitying smile that revealed a row of white aggressive teeth.

"Well, Voyd?" said Jack. He had no breath for more.

"I regret to say," returned the vicar, in a low voice, "that Mr. and Mrs. Temple are living together in defiance of the Seventh Commandment."

"Is there anything more?" asked Jack Sebright.

Neither his mother nor the vicar spoke. Jack had grown curiously calm.

"Good-bye, Voyd," he said; "I must think over what I have heard. To-morrow I shall ride over to Copse Hill and inquire for myself."

He left them together, and went off into a solitary place in the moorland—his favourite haunt beneath the whispering birch where he had dreamt of love—and tried to think clearly. He could not. The anger he had felt at finding his friends—

ay, and the parents of the girl he loved—so foully aspersed, had set his brain in a whirl. He cooled his heated forehead with the water of the little brooklet. He stretched himself on the grass, as if seeking solace—another Antaeus—from the touch of Mother Earth, and gazed upon the few flecks of white cloud that floated in a pale-blue sky. How long he lay, in a formless reverie, he knew not; but at last his brain received a sudden impulse. A robin perched on the spray above him, and showered forth such rapid rush of silver song that it awoke him to life and resolve. He looked up: there was the merry red-breasted atom distending its tawny throat, and filling the air with music. Jack sprang to his feet.

"Thanks, brave birdie!" he cried. "You've preached me a sermon, and the text is *Never Despair.*"

When Jack returned to the house, he found that the Rev. Vypar Voyd had gone, and his father had not yet returned. His mother was watching anxiously for him, hoping to have a chance of speaking to him before his father came in.

"Jack, dear!" she said, as he came in, "I am afraid you are very much upset. You must know that I love you too much too to vex you in any way. I could do anything in the world for you, Jack. I am only anxious for your happiness. Don't you believe in me, Jack? What else have I in the world to care for?"

"Mother, dear, I know you love me, and are anxious about me; but you must let me judge for myself sometimes. I am no longer a baby: I am old enough to see between right and wrong. I must at some time or other begin to act for myself, without being interfered with."

"You know I never have interfered with you, Jack. But on this occasion I am afraid you have been very much taken in with fascinating bad people. And oh! my dear boy, do consider the disgrace you will bring on your father and me if you should ever get mixed up with such people. Promise me one thing, Jack—that you will not go over to Copse Hill till you have looked at the matter more thoughtfully."

"I can't promise any such thing, mother. The character of my friend Frowde has been attacked, and I should be a coward if I did not tell him what I have heard."

"Will you promise me, then, that you will call on your friend Mr. Voyd first? Perhaps if you see him alone he will be able to tell you more on the subject and talk more earnestly."

"No, mother, I can't promise: for I don't believe in him."

"Jack, dear, you don't know what an earnest, self-sacrificing man he is; he is a very saint."

"A great deal too saintly for me."

"You would never have talked like that, Jack, before you knew those Frowdes."

"My dear mother, don't be so reproachful. You are exaggerating these things in your own mind; Mr. Voyd has had some strange effect on you. If Frowde is ever so bad, it can't hurt me to go over and hear what he has to say for himself. Every man ought to have a chance of justifying himself, if he will condescend to do it; but Frowde isn't the sort of man that would. So for once I must disregard your wishes, mother."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"CAN SUCH THINGS BE?"

Few dare, in this most slanderous world, defy
That demon-despot, the Ubiquitous Lie:
But whoso dares, in the first fire of youth,
Shall know Heaven's purest daughter, virgin Truth.

JACK SEBRIGHT rode away from home sorrowfully next morning. Seldom had he refused any request of his mother's, and he felt it hard that his first refusal should be connected with his young and happy, though unacknowledged love. Mrs. Sebright looked at him pathetically at breakfast, and said no word. As to his father, immersed as usual in his letters and papers and books, he just looked up as Jack rose to go, and said:

"Don't hurry home, my boy. Tell your friend Frowde I was delighted with that letter of his in the *Times* about wild birds."

How Mrs. Sebright longed for courage enough to tell her husband what a wicked man Mr. Frowde was! But then it suddenly occurred to her she had agreed with the vicar that nothing should be said to Mr. Sebright; and then, even more suddenly, her conscience smote her, and she felt that she had been wrong to make any agreement of the kind. Marston Sebright had a right to know every thought of her heart—had a paramount and incontestable right, where the welfare of their only child was concerned. She left the room rather hurriedly, and went away to think the matter out.

Not so fast as usual did Jack put Bessie along the well-accustomed road to Copse Hill, though he saw in a vision Kate Temple's bonny face at the end of his ride. Yesterday he had been indignant: to-day he was despondent. It was Jack's first encounter with "that demon-despot, the Ubiquitous Lie." That dominator of the sordid world is usually kicked out of our public schools, nor is he very popular at the universities; but, once you are beyond the happy regions of youth, he meets you at all hands. He speaks in the House, edits newspapers, charms you with his gossip in the club smoking-room, enlightens you as to the foibles of Mayfair matronhood and maidenhood. Jack Sebright had never been face to face with him before. It was a new and by no means pleasant sensation. Jack Sebright had never traversed the pleasant winding lanes from Ashton Minima to Copse Hill with so little elation of spirit or enjoyment of existence.

However, he reached the cheery green gate at last; and there was Frowde leaning over it, *Times* in hand, looking for subjects.

"My dear Sebright," he exclaimed, "this *is* a treat. So you have a holiday from your theology? I hope it is a long one. Come in, old fellow, Bessie knows her way to the stable. Of course you'll stay to dinner. The missus will be delighted to see you."

Jack, with his head full of the vicar's information, did not respond as frankly as usual. Frowde noticed it.

"Theology is boring you, Sebright, I should say. You're not your old jolly self. You must let dogma go to the dogs to-day, and enjoy the lovely summer afternoon."

"I wish I could," said Jack, in a tone so forlorn that Frowde could not help laughing at him. "I've so much to say to you," he went on, "and 'pon honour, I don't know where to begin."

"Don't begin," quoth Frowde, "at any rate not yet. A good Smaritan of my acquaintance has sent me some lobsters and Devonshire cream, and we are just going to combine them in a mayonnaise."

Frowde saw by Jack's rueful countenance that there was something on his mind, and he foresaw that the boy's countenance would not become less rueful when he heard of Kate Temple's absence; so he determined to cheer him with a gay meal and some merry nonsense before they could come to grave discourse. In this, as in all other things, Mrs. Frowde was his apt and ready ally.

A man must be inter-penetrated with dulness and depression, like a sponge with water, to resist the infectious gaiety of pleasant unaffected folk like Jack's friends. They were people who took seriously enough the serious side of life, but who were not so drearily stupid as to neglect its humorous side. It was their belief that difficulties were made to be overcome, and that the contest against them should be resolute, yet mirthful; and without that belief the condition of a man of letters in England must be a melancholy failure. For, while England enjoys some of the highest culture in the world, in no country are so few books bought in proportion to material wealth; in no country are the servants of literature less honoured—unless indeed they are opulent amateurs, or happen to become the fashion. Men hear Mr. Ruskin prophesying in the wilderness and maintaining that it is a fraud to read a book unless you buy it; then, with a smile at such impracticable opinions, they send to Mudie's for their light reading. Artists flourish: for your wife's portrait by Millais, or a rood of canvas covered with quasi-Greek figures by Leighton or Poynter, is a clear sign that you possess the chief of modern virtues—an ample balance at your bankers. But "writing fellows," as the leading literary journal of London calls those without whom it could not exist, require indomitable courage to make their way against the close-packed phalanx of astute publishers and malignant critics, and abundant humour to cheer their "uneasy steps over the burning waste."

It having been agreed that cream of Devon turned that king of insects, the lobster, into a perfect mayonnaise, and that Sauterne went excellent well therewith, Frowde got his young friend out on the lawn, and, as they paced up and down beneath the million-blossomed limes, listened to his story. Jack, who had been despondent before he faced his friend, had now become indignant again: his occasional bursts of eloquence were startling, and we fear he occasionally applied stronger epithets than were desirable to that ingenious and well-meaning young priest, the Rev. Vypar Voyd. He told Frowde all that he had heard, both as to himself and the Temples, and wound up by saying:

"What is a fellow to do? I am bound to believe that a clergyman would not speak in this way unless he had good reason. I could not get him to say anything clear about you, but you hear what he says of the Temples."

"I hear; and I maintain it to be false. If the man were

not an utter ignoramus, he would know who Mr. Temple is, and be thankful for so distinguished a parishioner. His vision is so circumscribed by this small parish that he can see nothing of the world's wide arena. He is like a gander in a pond, admired by its attendant geese and goslings: if an eagle from the cliffs above, with the light in his eye of the sun he has just soared to survey, or a peregrine falcon fresh from leagues of the sea, should rest on a tree close by, Anserculus stretches his long neck, and gives a fiery and vindictive hiss. Luckily, neither eagle nor falcon cares for such a pitiful quarry."

Jack laughed cheerily.

"The picture is very like," he said. "But how dare any man—and most of all a clergyman—make a false statement so audaciously?"

"The mania for gossip is a disease, like a dog's hunger for something putrescent. Leave this accusation against the Temples untouched: if the vicar should persist in it, he will probably receive a sharp lesson, that will teach him caution, if not charity. Charity, I fear, he cannot learn. And now as to myself. He simply says that I am one of the wicked. From his point of view I am. His religion is formal, while mine is spiritual. Instead of listening to his sermons on Sunday, I am sometimes compelled to write a political sermon for a morning paper, which cannot appear on Monday without leading articles. Strangely enough, many more things happen on Sundays than other days. Waterloo is one of many battles won and lost on the day dedicated to the Prince of Peace. I wish I had a record of the many times that a telegram has reached me on a Sunday, telling of some unexpected event, and demanding immediate comment thereon. Perhaps the leader sometimes did as much good as the sermon."

"Very likely," said Jack, rather absently, for, as they paced the turf, he was listening for the familiar click of the wicket-gate, which often opened for Kate Temple, tripping featly along the shadowy path. In his heart he was longing to exclaim—

> "Here comes the lady. Oh, so light a foot
> Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint."

But she came not, and Frowde proceeded.

"You see, Jack, Voyd makes no definite charge. He talks to your mother, amiably anxious to preserve you from con-

tamination; and thereby prevents my making any fuss, if it were worth while, because it would annoy Mrs. Sebright. Further, he declines to give up his authority. No gentleman would say a word against another man without being ready with proof; but a clergyman can do that to which a gentleman will not condescend. If he dare say anything distinctly libellous my solicitor shall take him in hand and compel an abject apology."

"I am so afraid he will make mischief," said Jack, despondently.

"He will try," replied Frowde, laughing. "The adroit way in which he has attacked your mother is very fine. Let him alone, I advise. If, however, his scandals make Mrs. Sebright uncomfortable, tell the story to your father at once."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly. He is a man of the world. He knows who Temple is, if Voyd does not. He knows me well enough to be sure that I am not a monster of wickedness. Speak freely to him."

Just then Mrs. Frowde joined them, and Jack forgot all about Voyd when he heard that Kate Temple would not that day come through the wicket gate.

"My luck!" he said. "She at Windermere, and I close to Dartmoor! Five hundred miles asunder, if it is an inch!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!

"Now, Mr. Ralph, do cheer up a bit, and come and sit down and have this nice bit of steak and onions I've got ready for your supper. I've taken extra pains with it, and have sent Jane off to bed, because I thought you'd like to be quiet; and here's the kettle just on the boil in case you finish up with a drop of something hot. Lor, Mr. Ralph! it makes me feel quite lonesome like to see you so down—you as used to be so particular in everything, and now hardly knows what you eats. Why, there's no pleasure in cooking for anyone as don't

enjoy their food. One would think now, Mr. Ralph, that it was yourself was crossed in love, instead of the master."

"There you are again, Mary, with your nonsense about love; you ought to know better, a sensible woman like you. If women would only attend to their own business and leave the men alone, everything would go right. I haven't felt well for some time, my girl, but I am better now," he said, drawing his chair up to the table, for the smell of the steak and onions was irresistible, and quite overcame Ralph's low spirits.

"And have the master settled when he goes a-shooting, Mr. Ralph? Because I should like a few days' holiday before he goes, if I am to be left here all the time you are away."

"Now, what can you want a holiday for, Mary? You've got all you want here."

"Have I?" said Mary; "that's all you know about it. Not a gown shall I have to my back, or a shoe to my foot, if I can't get a day or two for shopping."

"Ah, that's all you women think of—fine clothes and nonsense about sweethearts; but there, you always look very well, Mary," he said, looking up at her.

Mary looked pleased.

"The fact of the matter is," Ralph went on, "the master ain't going to the Earl's at all this year. I can't think what things are coming to. Master informed me to-day that he intends going away for about a month only, and he'll go very shortly."

"Well, when is there a chance for me, Mr. Ralph?"

"We can't spare you yet, Mary."

Ralph had for some time been unsconciously consoled by Mary.

Mary had a comfortable philosophic way of looking at things, and she knew all Ralph's moods better than he knew them himself. She knew when to speak and when to be silent. She always kept up the same respectful manner to Ralph, and never allowed him to suppose that she managed him. But she did manage him, undoubtedly. She had come to do it gradually, and now the silent Ralph had for some time confided his troubles concerning his master to her. Not that he did it confidentially, but patronizingly. Mary never appeared too eager to hear what Ralph had to say, but always managed to lead him on quietly till he had relieved his mind. She saw that he was unusually vexed to-night, and she endeavoured to make him unusually comfortable.

"And here's just the nicest little tart for you," she said,

bringing out from the oven a delicate-looking little pie. "The crust's as light as a feather, and can't hurt you."

"Your crusts are generally good, Mary." He might have said *always* with some truth, but this would have been, in Ralph's opinion, too much praise for a woman.

"And so the master ain't going a-shooting, after all?" said Mary.

"No, I wish he was; it would do him good."

Ralph said nothing more till he had finished the tart, and pushed away his plate, and sat back in his chair, when he remarked,

"He's going to an outlandish place up in the North."

"Indeed!" said Mary.

"Yes, and that isn't the worst of it."

"Ain't it now?" remarked Mary sympathetically.

"I was just passing the time of evening to Clope, the coachman, and thought I 'd stop for a word or two with him, when he told me his family have gone to the very same place."

"Well, now that's very odd. And I suppose you go of course, Mr. Ralph?"

"That's just what I said to the master, but he said it seemed scarcely worth while for so short a time. Mary, my girl, I felt so cut up. I never was so cut up. This is the first time the master has wanted me out of the way."

"There, now; just try a glass hot and strong, with a good squeeze of lemon, and I'll join you with just the least little drop for company. It's no good to grieve, Mr. Ralph."

"But what do you make of this, Mary?"

"Well, Mr. Ralph, I should say there was more in it than we knows on."

"But you can see master isn't in love with the young lady."

"No; but is it the other one?"

"It can't be: she's married."

"Married or not, I should say that's the one."

"But master and Mr. Temple are such good friends!"

"That may be; but are you sure she's Mrs. Temple?"

"They say she is, and the young lady speaks of her as her mother."

"Well, Mr. Ralph, as I said before, there's more than we guesses; but, mark my words, that's the one."

Two days after this conversation Mr. Forncett departed for Windermere, leaving Ralph to be consoled by Mary. And he

was to some extent consoled, but he was not happy about his master. He had hitherto supposed that he was entirely in his master's confidence,and he now began to suspect that not only had his master a secret from him, but that he had possessed that secret for many years.

He brooded over it for some days before mentioning it to Mary; for he felt that although Mary was good enough in her way—for a woman—yet anything so sacred as the feeling that existed between his master and him should not be discussed with her. But Mary managed Ralph so well that somehow he found himself one evening pouring out his heart to her, and wondering why the master had kept a secret from him all these years.

"Well, Mr. Ralph," said Mary, "you know when there's a woman in the case the gentlemen don't always speak. I dare-say, Mr. Ralph, if the truth was known, maybe you've had your own disappointment in your time."

"Perhaps I have, my girl."

"That's just it, Mr. Ralph. These bits of hussies break a good man's heart, and are like to be sorry enough for it in time to come, when they can't put things right again."

Before the evening finished, Mary had extracted from Ralph the romance of his youth.

"Well, as I says, here's two good lives spoilt by them bits of girls; for no doubt the lady over the way was the one as done it for master. Not as I mean to say the men are bound to look to the women for happiness, not at all: but it do look cheerful-like to see a man with a good wife and a nice family round him, and I am sure you and master would have made the best of husbands. But there! it is no good grieving; it can't be helped now." Which speech of Mary's made Ralph wonder when he went to bed whether it couldn't be helped after all—if the master didn't object.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A MEETING.

A woman who is light from heart to eye,
A woman who is love from eye to heart;
That is true beauty. Ah, on life's rough chart
Mark down the place of meeting ere you die,
If you have met such woman. Never sigh
If she desire you to dwell far apart:
Just to have made a vein of anger start
In her strong soul is something. Ah, but why
Is it that such a woman seldom sees
The man of calm imaginative brain,
The man who loves the birds and flowers and trees,
Who fathoms pleasure and finds power in pain?
One glance, one grasp, would make one flesh of these,
Yet go they wandering round the world in vain.

On a bright autumn morning Mr. Temple and his daughter are wandering on the margin of Windermere. Both look very thoughtful. Temple is pondering on a difficult subject in connection with Leonora, and Kate is thinking over a letter she has received from Mrs. Frowde. She is picturing Jack's disappointment at not finding her at Copse Hill, and is wondering whenever she shall see him again, now that he is such a long way off. But her face brightens up a bit as she determines to let Mrs. Frowde into her secret, and send a little note through her to Jack. Then she wonders what Mrs. Frowde means in her letter by saying that the mischief-making in the village is becoming serious, but she says to herself that nobody can make mischief about her and Jack, as they don't know her secret. So she trips along by the side of her father, wondering what she shall say in her little letter to Jack.

Meantime, Leonora is sitting by the window in the hotel, enjoying the morning air, which blows freshly over the lake. She is longing for, and yet dreading, a meeting which she knows must presently take place.

Suddenly a visitor is announced. Leonora moves forward to meet him.

"Leonora!"

"Frank!"

And a tight grasp of hands and the meeting of eyes spoke the love which should have been acknowledged sixteen years ago.

"Will you sit down, Fr—Mr. Forncett?" said Leonora, trying to speak in her ordinary way.

"There is no need for ceremony now, Leonora—at least, not at this meeting. Whether we are to be friends in future, or to separate for ever, let us realise for these few moments the love we have so long cherished. Tell me, Leonora, why did you marry that man?"

"I was young and silly, Frank, and disappointed that you went away, making no sign."

"Fool that I was!"

"I have suffered terribly, Frank."

"Can we not put an end to our suffering, Leonora?"

"No, I could not bear the disgrace."

"But think what will be gained for us both by it!"

"But even then I should not consider it right to marry again. It is the mistake of a lifetime, and we must bear it."

"Will you allow that bad man to wreck both our lives in this way? Leonora, darling, remember how many years I have suffered," and he stood before her holding both her hands, looking earnestly at her, a strong man humbled by his great love.

Leonora hesitated. She had for years longed for such a meeting, and for years she had struggled against her love. Her calmness and serenity were the result of self-control. She fancied, before she went to Copse Hill, that she had subdued all feelings of love; but the fire was only smothered up, to burn more brightly in the end.

As Frank stood before her, a very picture of strength and tenderness, she longed to be clasped in his arms, and to tell him that she would never separate from him again. For a moment the years of misery were forgotten, and she pictured the divine happiness within her reach. Hundreds of pleasant visions rose before her eyes. The weak, womanish side of her came to the front, and she had almost yielded. But the self-control which she had practised so long came to the rescue.

"No, Frank, it must not be," she said, speaking in a hard tone, with dry lips and parched tongue. "We must be content to wait and suffer. Do not say more. I cannot bear it now."

Some little time after Frank Forncett left the hotel, with despair written on his face. If he had known how events were hurrying on which would put an end to the years of disappointment and suffering, his despair might have turned into joy.

Presently he met Temple, who saw only too plainly what the result of the interview had been.

"Run on, child," Temple said to Kate, "and see how mamma is."

"Will she agree to it?" he said to Frank.

"No," answered Frank. "I am afraid she will never be persuaded. I honour her for it, but it is very hard that our lives should be thus broken up by a scoundrel."

"She may change her mind in time, when she has seen something more of you," said Temple.

"I fear not," said Frank. "She has a strong passionate nature, which she has learnt by suffering to control completely. This gives her more than ordinary strength to bear trouble, and firmness to resist acting in any way against her conscience."

"You are right, Forncett. She is a grand woman. She has been the greatest comfort to me all these years, and has quite supplied the place of a mother to my little Kate. I don't think poor Kate has ever understood that disgrace is attached to her mother's name, and I hope she never may."

"It would be cruel for me now to take Leonora away from you," said Frank. "She has been everything in the world to you and little Kate; and yet I cannot help wishing for her. I have borne my disappointment all this time philosophically. I knocked about the world enjoying my self after my own fashion, prepared at any time to marry if I could find a woman like Leonora. As a younger son, I was not likely to be much sought after. But I never found one who came up to my ideal. I have occasionally come across *that scoundrel*, or seen some mention of him, but I had no idea of what had become of Leonora. I sometimes longed to know, but I thought it better not to inquire. Then some fatality, or what the world would call mere chance, led us to the same little out-of-the-way corner. Up to that time, Temple, I could take the world calmly, but now the old feeling has come upon me with double strength. I have the fiery love of my youth with the strength of my age. I cannot overcome it. All my philosophy is now useless to me. I turn from my books, which have always been my best friends. I can do nothing."

Temple could scarcely realise Forncett's depth of feeling; but he tried to console him, and give him hope that his wishes would one day be realized.

Kate wrote a long and rather incoherent letter to Mrs. Frowde that afternoon, finishing with this sentence:

"And now if, after all I have told you, you do not think it very wrong, will you send the enclosed to my dear Jack."

The note to "dear Jack" contained only a few simple words of love.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SUNSHINE AND SLANDER.

Some thirty miles from Megalopolis,
Miles also from the shrieking, griding rail,
On a high road where once the four-horse mail
Flashed gaily past—so placed my cottage is:
Roars merrily now the wind tall limes between,
Which guard my quiet lawn, a triangle scalene.

And you may see me, if you pass this way,
Lean on my gate and look into the road,
And listen to the skylark's joyous ode—
Thoughtful, not oft cigarless. Will you say,
"Who wears that velvet coat, a trifle tattered,
That curious cool straw hat, which wind and rain have battered?"

THE broad sunshine lay over the beautiful little village of Copse Hill. There was a look of peacefulness everywhere. Old Biggins sat on the bench outside the Pleiades, fast asleep. Mrs. Biggins's pigeons were on the roof, spreading out their wings to catch the sunshine. Miss Tattleton's shop looked lazy and sleepy, though inside was the buzz of gossip, for Mrs. Vypar Voyd was there, gleaning the latest news or lies of the village. There was a continual murmur of bees in the tall limes that overshadowed Manly Frowde's garden.

Manly Frowde, in his old velvet coat and straw hat, leaned over his gate, with his inseparable companions, his wife and dog, watching for the midday post.

"The village seems quite dull," he remarked to his wife, "now that little Kate has gone. It was pleasant to have her running in and out, and see her romping about on her pony. And I miss my occasional chats with Forncett. He is a man worth knowing. What romantic histories there are in families! I was astonished at what Temple told us. I wonder how it will end. It was so strange that they should have been brought together in this little corner."

"I think a woman might bear a great deal for such a man as Mr. Forncett," said Mrs. Frowde.

The postman handed them papers and letters, and they walked across the lawn to the house, the old big dog gravely carrying the *Times* newspaper in his mouth.

"Why, here is more romance," said Mrs. Frowde, reading Kate's long letter written in a girlish handwriting. "I had no idea it had gone so for as this. Kate and Jack are actually engaged."

"The little rascal," said Manly, "why didn't she tell us before? I shall write some verses and chaff her."

Manly Frowde had a habit of writing pleasant letters in verse to his friends. To his lady-friends he often wrote the most charming lines. Kate had already received perhaps a dozen such letters, for he could turn the most trivial incident into poetry.

Such verses are innocently written and received. It never occurred to Kate or Manly Frowde that there were people in the world who would consider these communications between a man and woman as wicked and disreputable.

Kate used to show them to her father and Leonora with great glee, and Mr. Temple had once remarked,

"Take care of them, my child; you may some day know their value," which advice, if taken, might have saved the mischief that was afterwards made, when some of them were sent to the wash in the pocket of a gown.

So Manly Frowde's first impulse, on hearing that Kate was engaged to Jack, was to write her some verses.

"But it is a great secret," said Mrs. Frowde; "and she has told no one but me," and she passed him the letter.

"That is like these children," he said, "making a secret of it. It is all straight enough, and they need not be afraid; but young lovers always fancy the world is going to interfere with them. You can't do any harm in sending on that letter, and it will be a consolation to Jack, who looked very downhearted the other day when he came over here."

So the letter was sent to Jack, and much pleasant nonsense was written to the young people.

In the meantime Mrs. Voyd has been having a long gossip with Miss Tattleton. Miss Tattleton has found out the sort of news that the vicar likes supplied to him, so she always has a stock ready.

When Mrs. Voyd, overflowing with all she had heard, reached the Vicarage, she found several members of her family in consultation with the vicar.

"It is a serious—a very serious hindrance to me in my work," said the vicar.

"What a pity we cannot get rid of those Frowdes!" said the Reverend Uriah Urgent.

"What do you think that Mrs. Frowde has done now?" almost shrieked Mrs. Voyd.

"What?" exclaimed many voices eagerly.

"Kitty Fisher went to ask her to pack up some shirts, which had been made in the schools for her boy, to go by post, and the creature positively had the impudence to ask Kitty how much she paid for the shirts. When Kitty told her, she said she could buy such shirts ready made for less than half the price. Fancy her setting the poor people against us in that way! It is as good as to say I am a thief."

"Disgraceful!" shouted everybody.

"As if it were her business, whatever I choose to charge," she continued. "The lower classes are quite ungrateful enough without having such ideas put in their heads. Why, the work is done by the school children, and no charge made to them for it; and they're none of them grateful. If Mrs. Frowde is going to interfere in this way, we shall never be able to keep the lower classes in order."

"I have received a letter from her on the subject," said the Rev. Vypar Voyd; "an insulting letter—in fact, I may say a most insulting letter—for it certainly is not her province to interfere with us about the materials used for the garments of the poor."

"And what do you think?" said Mrs. Voyd—"that Mr. Forncett has gone to the same place as the Temples. I think it looks very odd."

"Ah," said Mr. Voyd, shaking his head, "I am afraid there is more in it than we think. I don't at all like the behaviour of Miss Temple. Of course, with such an example as her father, you cannot expect much; but I pity my friend Sebright, I really do, if he believes in that girl. I am afraid she is bad—very bad. I have heard that she is excessively free both with Mr. Frowde and Mr. Forncett; in fact, I have heard very bad things hinted with reference to her and Mr. Frowde."

"Oh, what is it, Vypar?" asked several Urgent girls at once.

"It is not for you to know," said Mr. Voyd. "I should not like any ladies connected with me to be contaminated with such things."

"What an odious girl!" said one of these sweet young ladies.

"Let her be a warning to you, my dears," said the Rev. Uriah, in an unctuous tone.

"I really think Vypar ought to warn his friend Mr. Sebright," said Mrs. Voyd.

"I have done my best," said the vicar, "to warn my friend; and if he can be kept from the society of Mr. Frowde, I have no doubt I may make some impression on him. I have pledged my word solemnly—most solemnly—to Mrs. Sebright that I will, if possible, keep her son out of danger, and I am bound—religiously bound—to keep my word."

"Don't you think," said the Rev. Uriah, speaking in a low tone, that his innocent daughters should not hear, "you might call on the Temples, and remonstrate with them as parishioners on their course of life?"

"It was my intention—my full intention—to do so when they return," said Mr. Voyd. "I feel that I shall not be performing my duty, if I do not warn them—seriously warn them."

The Urgent girls were by this time all talking together, and carrying on an affectionate discourse with their sister, Mrs. Voyd, on other people's affairs.

It never occurred to these young ladies that there was any harm in gossip. They did it for mere excitement. They would cast away a reputation with a few words, in the most reckless way. When they chanted the sixth commandment, on Sundays (they were in the choir), it did not occur to them that there were other ways of committing murder than taking the physical life of a person. We are told in the book of *Wisdom*, chapter the first, verse the eleventh, "The mouth that slandereth, slayeth the soul." But doubtless these young ladies had not read the Book of Wisdom; neither perhaps, had they read some capital verses, which appeared in an American paper, on the death of the king of the Cannibal Islands; some of which are quite worth quoting for the benefit of lovers of gossip,—

How fond he was of children! To his breast
  The tenderest nurslings gained a free admission.
Rank he despised, nor, if they came well *dressed*,
  Cared if they were plebeian or patriciān.
Shade of Leigh Hunt! Oh, guide this laggard pen
To write of one who loved his fellow-men!

But the deceased could never hold a candle
  To those prim, pale-faced people of propriety
Who gloat o'er gossip and get fat on scandal—
  The cannibals of civilized society;

They drink the blood of brothers with their rations,
And crunch the bones of living reputations.

They kill the soul; he only claimed the dwelling.
They take the sharpened scalpel of surmises
And cleave the sinews when the heart is swelling,
And slaughter Fame and Honour for their prizes.
They make the spirit in the body quiver;
They quench the Lights! He only took the—Liver!

Killing a reputation, more or less, was mere sport to these ladies, and it was rather dull work for them when no sport was to be had. Just now, between the Temples and Frowdes, and Mr. Forncett and Jack Sebright, they had plenty of amusement.

"And now, my dears," said the Reverend Uriah Urgent to his daughters, "I think we must be going home."

"Don't forget the harvest decorations," said Mrs. Voyd, "I shall expect some of you to come and help me."

"Yes," said Mr. Voyd, "I hope you quite understand that I do not want any of Mrs. Frowde's flowers used in the church. I find she has been in the habit of giving flowers for the decorations, and, though her hyacinths last Easter were beautiful, I have doubts—serious doubts—whether flowers grown by her should be used. She scarcely ever attends church, so she must not have the privilege of placing flowers there."

"You are quite right," said the Reverend Uriah.

And these two worthy divines felt a comfortable satisfaction in having denounced a woman who appeared to them to be very bad.

This incident of the flowers somehow reached the ears of Manly Frowde, who immediately threw off the following epigram—

The Vicar in the joyous autumn hours
Deems Christ insulted by a sinner's flowers,
Yet Christ the pitiful had no such sneers
When once a sinner washed his feet with tears.

Did it ever occur to the vicar that one who heartily loves flowers cannot be quite blind to God, the giver of flowers? But perhaps the vicar's mind was too much occupied with dogma to be able to catch at so simple a truth.

CHAPTER XL.

COPSE HILL AND WINDERMERE.

Somebody to love—lawfully, you know, of course—is what few men or women can do without. I should feel a very poor creature if there were not a pleasant group of friends (of both sexes, mind you, for I believe in female friendships) who would not be loyal to me as I to them. But the One to love! That is the light of life.—*A Fight with Fortune.*

COPSE HILL was always famous for gossip. It could hardly be otherwise while a woman of so much wit as Miss Tattleton held the village shop. She knew how to embellish a tale to suit the exact taste of the listener, and she would tell it in half a dozen different ways to the different people who came to gossip. If it was the latest news of the "author over the way" (and this seemed the chief excitement in the village) she would give one version to Squire Perivale when he turned in for a gossip, another to Mrs. Lovelace, another to the parish clergywoman, another to Mrs. Voyd, and another to "old Uriah," as she called the Vicar of Battlefield. There were other places in the village where gossip could be had, but no one could tell a tale so well as Miss Tattleton. So long as these worthy people who frequented her shop heard what she had to say of their neighbours, but not what she said of themselves, they found it pleasant pastime. Miss Tattleton was everybody's friend, and everybody's enemy. She was such a curious mixture of good-nature and spite that it was impossible to say which quality predominated. Just as she had done some kind and brave action which made you forget that she ever had a fault, she would do or say something so extraordinarily spiteful that you forgot she had a spark of kindness in her. But her gossip had, perhaps, seldom been taken very seriously until now. Any remark of hers, however strong, was not considered sufficient to take away a person's character.

Biggins also liked a bit of gossip, and had a rough way of making remarks on the people as they walked or drove past the inn.

"Ah," grunted Biggins, as a carriage containing two ladies passed, "a nice lot of tales the tiles of their roof could tell if they could speak," and then he would relate horrible things,

which, if true, would show that the family were guilty of dreadful crimes.

In fact, if all the stories were true which Miss Tattleton and Biggins had to tell of the various families, Copse Hill ought to be destroyed from off the face of the earth, for Sodom and Gomorrah were nothing to it.

But the gossip had hitherto been confined to the lower classes. It was not until Mr. Voyd, in his eagerness for reform in the parish, encouraged people to talk of their neighbours, that any importance was attached to it. When Miss Tattleton and Biggins found that their tales were listened to, they took the more pleasure in telling them, and embellishing them. They began to find themselves of some mark in the village, since they were of so much use to the vicar. They were even beginning to forget their differences with this common bond of union between them, and Biggins had gone so far as to post *some* of his letters at Miss Tattleton's.

With the help of these two village worthies, and the Miss Urgents, and Mrs. Vypar Voyd, and Mr. Voyd's good intentions, the stories concerning the Temples, the Frowdes, Jack Sebright, and Mr. Forncett, soon became so multiplied and ornamented that a very pretty little history was made up. 'Tis true the various tales did not always agree, but it was generally settled that Mr. Temple lived with some one who was not his wife, that Miss Temple was a "bold, forward girl, who had entrapped Jack Sebright, and was carrying on with Mr. Forncett and Mr. Frowde."

"I have positively seen that man Frowde kiss that girl in the dusk of the evening at her gate in the lane. They didn't know I was looking, though," said one gossip.

"Oh! and have you heard the last news of her?" said another. "She's had verses written to her by that man, for Widow Wright found them in the pocket of her dress when it went to the wash, and I've heard they've been given up to the parson's hands."

So our little heroine had by this time got a very bad character, and, as the gossips expressed it, "none of the lot were any better than they should be."

While all this mischief was brewing, the Temples, unconscious of what was in store for them on their return to Copse Hill, were quietly enjoying life at Windermere.

Kate has been longing to tell her secret to Leonora. She is obliged to muster up all her resolution to keep it to herself. Every morning, when she wakes, she wonders whether she

will get through the day without getting rid of her great secret; but she argues with herself that Jack knows best, and that he told her to be patient for a little time, only it seems a very long time to her. She sympathises with Leonora, but Leonora is too much taken up with the fight that is going on in her own mind between a sense of duty and a longing for happiness to notice any difference in Kate.

On a misty-bright October morning, Mr. Temple and Leonora and Kate are out walking, when Frank Forncett joins them. Kate soon manages to get her father somewhat in advance of Frank and Leonora, thinking they will like to be left together.

They loiter on, talking in easy, friendly fashion, as if they were mere pleasant acquaintances. And yet how difficult they both find it to keep up that easy chat! They are both suffering from intense joy and intense pain. They are both strong, noble characters, full of feeling, and yet firm enough to repress feeling when necessary. They have practised repression for years, and now the youthful love they have so long repressed has broken out into an almost unquenchable fire. Can they now repress it? They are trying to do so. They are happy in their love—for love must bring happiness, however much misery it may also bring—and they are miserable because they are trying to repress their love. The anguish of high natures like these cannot be realized by many; but then happiness is in proportion to it. Here are two people who are absolutely one in heart and soul: their spirits have commingled: yet must they act the part of mere acquaintances. So they walk along on that bright October morning, trying to act their part.

They come to a point where the walking is rough, and Frank offers his arm to Leonora. She hesitates before accepting it, knowing well the magnetism there is in the touch of one we love. She unconsciously looked up at Frank, and his eyes met hers. The mischief was done without the touch of the hands, and the acting broken for the moment. She accepted his help, and they walked on silently for some time.

"Leonora," said Frank presently, "it is useless for us to act in this way; I cannot bear it. I love you madly, passionately. I cannot live without you. Why were we brought together in this curious manner, if we are to be again separated? Surely it is best to get happiness at any price. Leonora, have pity on me!" and he kissed her passionately.

"Frank, Frank, it must not be. Your love cannot be greater than mine."—He looked gratefully at her.—"I have as much to bear as you have, and you should help me to bear it, instead of tempting me. We must be merely friends, or we must separate altogether."

"No, not separate, Leonora. Now I have found you, we will not separate, but if you decree that we are to be friends only, I must obey, though ever so reluctantly. But, Leonora, do think what happiness is within reach!"

"Frank, you are cruel to talk thus. You must help me to bear it. Now give me your hand, and let us make a solemn compact that we will be friends, dear and intimate friends, if you like, but that nothing but words of friendship shall pass between us."

Frank gave his hand and promised.

"My life will be a happier one for your companionship," said Leonora, "and perhaps, as years go on, we shall really become friends, and forget there was ever any other feeling between us."

"That would be impossible," said Frank.

And so Frank and Leonora walked on side by side, merely a couple of friends, and yet with a love between them that nothing could quench. How they will keep their compact, we shall see.

The Temples returned to Copse Hill, Leonora happy with the idea that Frank's society would add to the pleasure of their quiet life.

CHAPTER XLI.

A PRIESTLY MISSION.

Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny.—*Hamlet.*

The owl may hoot, the bat may hiss,
Yet doves will coo, and sweethearts kiss:
I do not deem the deed amiss—
What say you, lady mine?—M.C.

Our friends were not destined to have the quiet life upon which they calculated.

The vicar was full of good intentions—more than usually full—and, as he remarked himself, "no time must be lost in warning those people seriously of the danger of their mode of

life." Moreover, he had pledged himself to Mrs. Sebright to take means to break off the connection between her son and the Frowdes and Kate Temple. Therefore, one morning he started from the vicarage wearing a more saintly smile than ever.

He nodded patronisingly to his parishioners as he passed them, and entered the gate at Winterslow with no misgivings as to his capacity for undertaking such a mission. But he was a little nervous when Mr. Temple received him, and he found it difficult to open the subject on which he came.

Mr. Temple, supposing he was merely making a call, perhaps for some parish subscription, made it the more difficult by conversing freely on general subjects, thinking thereby to diminish the vicar's embarrassment. William Temple possessed the natural politeness which induces a man to put everyone about him at ease; he had, moreover, a courtly manner. The more he tried to put Mr. Voyd at ease, the more nervous the vicar became.

The subject of the weather had been exhausted, and the bad harvest lamented, and the prospects of the root crops discussed, and the probable condition of the poor during the coming winter commented on.

"Now," thought Mr. Temple, "he will be able to mention the subscription if he wants one."

But no: the vicar did not mention a subscription, and only looked more nervous than ever. Mr. Temple felt uncomfortable at not being able to put him at ease, and said presently, in a kind tone,

"I shall be only too glad, Mr. Voyd, to help you in your parish work so far as my purse is concerned; but I fear I can be of little use in any other way. What can I do for you?"

This was awkward for Mr. Voyd. He had come to censure this man, who appeared to him to be leading an evil life, and he was received with such courtesy and kindness that his tongue seemed to be tied. If he had been a judge of character he could never for a moment have mistaken the fine frank fellow who stood there on the hearthrug, showing so clearly in his face that mixture of severity and tenderness which is often seen in great characters. William Temple was a polished gentleman; but he was something more—a natural gentleman. Suffering for years from the faults and weaknesses of others, he was perhaps a little intolerant of weakness, and was rather inclined to look upon stupidity as a crime.

But the vicar was no judge of character. Still he had some sort of instinct which made him feel that the man standing before him was a much greater man than himself, and that it was an awkward thing to have to reprove him. He began to wish he had not undertaken the mission. He almost thought he would abandon it at the last moment. It even occurred to him that his father-in-law, the Rev. Uriah Urgent, being an older man, would manage the business better. The vicar had never felt so little confidence in himself before. He was a man who thoroughly believed in himself.

But there was one quality in the vicar on which he most prided himself—a quality which must be deemed good or bad according to results — namely, a dogged sense of duty. Most people would term it a *high* sense of duty; but *high sense* can only exist in high natures. To go blindly and doggedly at duty does as much harm as good.

This sense of duty came to the vicar's aid on this occasion. He argued with himself that, however great William Temple might be, he, by virtue of his office, was placed above him, and it was his duty, both for the example set to his parishioners, and for Temple's own sake, to warn him of the consequences of living in a state of sin. These thoughts had been slowly making their way through the vicar's mind while Temple had been endeavouring to relieve him of his embarrassment.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Voyd?" Mr. Temple repeated. "Is it coals, or a soup-kitchen, or blankets, or flannel petticoats that are wanted?" he added laughing. "Pray make use of my purse for any or all."

"Really, Mr. Temple, you are kind—very kind——" stammered out the vicar, turning red in the face, and shifting his legs uneasily; "but it is not for any subscription I have called this morning."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Temple, losing something of his pleasant manner, for his thoughts travelled quickly, and the vicar spoke and thought slowly, and a slow-brained man is excessively irritating to a quick one.

"I have come this morning to perform a duty—a most painful duty," slowly proceeded the vicar.

"Indeed!" said Temple. "Pray let me know quickly what it is."

This was trying to the vicar. It was just what he could not do. He was in the habit of being deliberate—most deliberate—as he would himself express it; and it is pro-

bable that it was to give himself time to think while talking that he formed the habit of continually repeating his phrases with the addition of an emphatic adjective. Mr. Temple's impatience did not help him.

"Really," he went on hesitatingly, "I feel that my task is an excessively painful one."

"Yes?" said Temple interrogatively, and in an unconcerned tone.

The vicar felt more and more discouraged. He thought he would go to the point at once.

"Common report——" he began more boldly.

"Common report is a common liar, sir," quickly said Temple.

Mr. Voyd looked up astonished at what he considered rather strong language, not knowing it was a quotation, for his literature extended not much beyond the Commentators and the *Guardian*, to which authorities he often referred. The remark was not encouraging.

"What I mean," said the vicar, "is that your mode of life is subject to remark—to much remark—amongst your neighbours."

"Mr. Voyd," said Temple, very severely, "you surely do not intend to waste your own and my time by repeating to me what is the opinion of my neighbours concerning my mode of life? May I beg that this interview may terminate?" and he made a gesture towards the door.

The vicar was getting very uncomfortable. He found this polished gentleman difficult to manage. He could in no way meet him on his own ground. But, having gone so far, his dogged sense of duty urged him on. He tried to come to the point at once. He felt that it was urgent; that he must seize the opportunity now, or he would lose it, for he would never care to encounter William Temple again, so he blurted out—

"It is really only a most important sense of duty that urges me to warn you of the danger of continuing your mode of life. I"—and here he stammered very much—"I—understand—that you have—in fact—that you are—living in open breach of the Seventh Commandment." He lowered his voice to a whisper as he said the last words, as if even the mention of such a thing were only too horrible, and he wore a saintly look of reproof. The whole manner of the speech might be said by an unfeeling critic to be theatrical, and well calculated to take effect. What effect did it have upon the man to whom it was addressed?

Anyone accustomed to him would have noticed a variety of expressions pass over his face as he stood there silent for a minute. Presently he said, with a sarcastic smile, and in a low tone as if to himself,

"I wonder why God sent so many fools into the world." To Mr. Voyd he turned and said, in a pitying tone,

"I've no doubt your motive in thus speaking to me is good, and that you imagined you had cause so to speak, but you have made an unfortunate mistake."

The Vicar, who had begun to take courage and to congratulate himself on having got through the worst part of his task, now felt more wretched than ever. He had not calculated on any mistake, neither had he calculated on such calmness. If Temple would only lose his temper, he felt he might have the advantage: but there he stood—a calm, severe, well-bred man. What could the Vicar do next?

"It is on authority—most reliable authority—that I speak," he said.

"The name of your authority, if you please," said Temple.

"I am bound—in honour bound—not to give it up."

"You can scarcely call any authority reliable without the name. But 'tis no matter," he said unconcernedly. The whole thing seemed so contemptible to him.

"I am very sorry," began the Vicar.

"Oh! pray don't trouble to mention it," said Temple. "I merely demand, for the sake of the lady who is attacked with myself, that an apology shall be made by the person whom you style your most reliable authority. That person will probably like to know all circumstances concerning my family. You may therefore tell him that, about twenty years ago, I married a very young lady. I imagined she loved me, but perhaps she was too young to know her own mind. Some few years after my sister married Mr. Arundel Lifton. That marriage proved even more unfortunate than my own, for Mr. Lifton very soon left her, and took with him my wife. I obtained a divorce—my sister would not, as she could not bear the disgrace of having her name in court. She came to live under my protection, and took charge of my little girl, to whom she has been a mother. She would not use the name of that infamous man, her husband, so took her maiden name; but mistakes are often made, as my little girl regards her as a mother, and addresses her as such. She hoped, in this corner of the

world, to live peacefully and quietly, but it seems we are mistaken. That is all I have to say."

"I am sorry—truly sorry——" began the Vicar again, but Mr. Temple interrupted him.

"Pray say nothing. I am sure your intentions are good, but you have been unfortunate in this matter." And Mr. Temple was proceeding to open the door, but Mr. Voyd had other good intentions, which he had not fulfilled yet. He felt that hitherto he had been at a decided disadvantage, but he thought what he had now to say might rather alter matters.

"I was commissioned by Mrs. Sebright," said Mr. Voyd, feeling it was easy to shift the responsibility to some one else, "to speak to you about her son, who is a very dear friend of mine."

"I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Sebright, though I know her son; but don't you think it would be advisable for her to communicate with me herself?" Mr. Temple was getting tired of the Vicar.

The Vicar did not think it was advisable: it was not what he wanted.

"Scarcely, I think," he said. "The fact is, the matter rather lies within my province, but it concerns you nearly—very nearly; in fact, it concerns Miss Temple."

"Miss Temple!" said Temple, for once a little astonished.

"Yes," said the Vicar, seeing his advantage, "Miss Temple is excessively intimate with those people next door, the Frowdes."

"I am aware of it," said Temple.

"I have reason—grave reason—to fear that the Frowdes are very undesirable acquaintances."

"That must be left to my judgment," said Temple.

"Mrs. Sebright is most anxious that her son should not visit there," said Mr. Voyd.

"I do not know Mrs. Sebright, and I cannot enter into her anxious feelings."

"Her son has met Miss Temple there."

"I am aware of it."

"She has cause—good cause—to fear that there is some entanglement between her son and Miss Temple."

"Entanglement between my daughter and Mr. Sebright? Pray explain."

The Vicar found it difficult to explain.

"I really do not wish to hurt your feelings," he began.

"It is not a matter of *feeling*, it is *fact* that I require."

"I am reluctant—very reluctant, to relate what I have actually seen happen between the young people, but I feel it to be my duty—my bounden duty—to my dear friend Mrs. Sebright, to whom I have pledged my word—my most solemn word—that I will guard her son's interests. I have been a witness—a most unwilling witness—on two occasions—of familiarities that have passed between Mr. Sebright and your daughter."

The vicar stopped here to see what effect his words produced, but Mr. Temple simply said,

"Go on."

The vicar was taking courage and forgetting his nervousness.

"What Mr. Sebright's intentions towards Miss Temple may be I do not know; he has not confided them to his mother, to whom he is accustomed to tell everything, but I fear your daughter does not think seriously of him, as I hear that her behaviour with your neighbour Mr. Frowde is open to very grave remark."

"I think after the experience of this morning, Mr. Voyd, we will confine our attention to what you have *seen*, not what you have heard."

"Unfortunately, I have proof—visible proof—of the feeling that exists between Miss Temple and Mr. Frowde. This letter"—producing a paper inscribed with the unmistakable, strong handwriting of Mr. Frowde—"is, I think you will acknowledge, from Mr. Frowde to your daughter."

"It is," said Mr. Temple, "and what harm is there in it?"

"I think those are hardly the terms in which a gentleman should address a lady who is not related to him," said the vicar.

Mr. Temple stood in thought for a momont, twisting the scrap of paper in his hand.

"Capital handwriting it is," he said, as if to himself; then turning to Mr. Voyd, he said politely,

"I really need not trouble you to prolong this interview; I will see Mrs. Sebright myself. Allow me to open the door," and he walked across the hall to the front door. "Good morning. Rest assured I will see Mrs. Sebright."

The vicar would rather not have rested in this assurance.

He was a little uncomfortable. He had made a mistake; but he consoled himself with the thought that he had done it with the best intentions. Yet he walked back to the Vicarage with a disappointed feeling. He even forgot to nod approv-

ingly to his parishioners as he passed them, and he allowed a carriage containing ladies of the neighbourhood to pass without the salute on which he prided himself—which was always accompanied by the saintly smile and the exhibition of the row of shining teeth.

What could have vexed him so much? Was he sorry at having made a mistake, or was there somewhere in his heart behind that dogged sense of duty a love of a spicy little bit of scandal?

Then he tried to persuade himself that at least he had done something in the matter of Jack Sebright and Miss Temple. Still he felt not altogether happy about that, for Mr. Temple had not taken it as he expected, and had dismissed him rather abruptly.

He had yet the pleasure of telling Mrs. Voyd the history of Mr. Temple's misfortunes, and she of course told the seven Miss Urgents, and they of course told all their various acquaintances for miles round; and whether it was the vicar's fault, or Mrs. Voyd's, or the seven Miss Urgents', will never be known, but by the time the story reached Miss Tattleton, and went out with the tea, and sugar, and candles from her shop, it was generally reported that there was "something wrong at the house over there, and the lady is no more Mrs. Temple than I am, and that's why she never shows herself; and the young lady has been carrrying on with Mr. Frowde and several other gentlemen." And all this arose from the mistakes of a well-intentioned young vicar. He really did it with the best intentions.

CHAPTER XLII.

VISITORS TO COPSE HILL.

What wretches are hordinary servants that go hon in the same vulgar track every day! eating, working, and sleeping! But we who have the honour to serve the nobility, are of another speeches. We are above the common forms.—*High Life below Stairs.*

After closing the door on the vicar, Mr. Temple walked into his library and sat down to think. He was distressed by a variety of feelings. Nothing irritated him so much as stupidity, and to Mr. Temple the vicar seemed very stupid. There was something in the vicar's manner especially irrita-

ting to a quick-brained man. He talked slowly and with diffidence, as if he were open to correction, yet there never was a man less ready to receive a new idea. He would make up his mind doggedly and stolidly on any subject, and the cleverest man could not make him alter it. Probably he had no room in his brain for a change of opinion. Mr. Temple's foremost feeling was that he had been most unpleasantly irritated for the last half hour. He found it difficult to quiet his nerves and think it all over.

Thus he soliloquised:

"Why need one care what people of this sort say? Unfortunately, people of this sort are in the majority, and one is at their mercy. Being in the majority, they can make the world uncomfortable. But why *are* fools in the majority? Fancy the fellow making mischief out of this little scrap! I wonder where he got it from?"

He was still twisting Manly Frowde's letter in his hand.

"In league with servants, I suppose. Of course, after what he said about this, there's nothing in his ridiculous remarks about young Sebright. Young people probably romping or flirting. I'll mention it to Leonora. No, perhaps it will be best to say nothing about it; it might put the idea into the child's head, if she heard of it, and I don't want her to fall in love for a few years. Young Sebright's a fine young fellow, but he'll probably marry soon, and I can't spare Kate yet. We'd better get away from here for a month or two. It's disappointing just as we've settled down, and it's humiliating to be driven away by people of this sort, but it will not do for Kate to hear all this gossip. They will find some new subject by the time we return, and young Sebright will perhaps be appointed to a living at a distance. Poor Leonora! There's no peace anywhere."

Leonora appeared at this moment, and put an end to Mr. Temple's train of thought. She looked younger and handsomer than she had done for ten years. When a woman is in love she generally improves in appearance; and although Leonora tried to persuade herself that from henceforth there would be only a friendship between Frank and herself, she was truly and desperately in love; with a love much stronger and deeper than any girl's could be.

"William," she said, "there's Lord Medway's four-in-hand just arrived. They look such a merry party. Frank was on the box seat, and I suppose it was Lord Medway driving—but he's not at all like his father or Frank; and the Earl is there

and two young men, who, I daresay, are Lord Medway's friends."

Ralph was at the gate to receive them, and went round with the servants and horses to the inn.

"What a change it will be for Ralph to have so many in the house, and what a merry party they'll be!"

"Yes," said Temple, "and I was hoping that you would have joined a little in their merriment, but I find I am suddenly wanted in town, on some political business, Leonora, and I don't know how long I may be detained there, and I know you will not like to be left alone."

"Oh, William," said Leonora, losing the colour which love or the bright October air had given to her cheeks, "why must you go now? Surely there is nothing to do in October when everyone is away."

"It is absolutely necessary, I must go, and at once. I should like to start to-morrow," said William.

Leonora did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Since her compact with Frank she had been a far happier woman, because love must necessarily bring happiness. But she often doubted whether she was right in remaining within sight of the man she loved; whether it would not be better to go away and forget him altogether. She had been looking forward eagerly to the arrival of Frank, and the commencement of that friendship and companionship that they had planned together; and yet she knew that her own nature and Frank's were such that it was almost impossible to keep the compact. Now she was superstitious enough to imagine that fate had interposed to prevent her from seeing him. William Temple could not understand such depth of love as his sister had for Frank, and he took the change in her face to mean merely disappointment.

"Never mind, Leonora," he said, "you'll see Frank often enough when we come back."

While Mr. Temple and his sister are making arrangements to go to town, Ralph has gone round with Lord Medway's drag and servants to see if they can have stable room at the Pleiades. In the old coaching days thirty-six coaches a day passed the inn, and many of them changed horses there, so the stabling accommodation is large in proportion to the house, and there was not room for the horses at The Birches.

Biggins, who was no friend to Ralph, and spoke of him generally as "that seedy chap," was a little more respectful when he saw him in company of what he afterwards described

as "them two flash servants, and they fine cattle," and went to ask him what he could do for him.

Ralph explained that he wanted to put up Lord Medway's coach and horses for two or three days.

"What! your master got a real live lord down here!" said Biggins, in a lively tone. "You don't mean it, though, do you?" and he dug his fat elbow into Ralph's side, and gave as knowing a wink as the overhanging fat on his eyelids and cheeks would let him.

"You great fool?" said Ralph contemptuously. "Don't you know my master is brother to Lord Ravensbourne, and young Lord Medway, that this coach belongs to, is his nephew? Why, I thought everyone knew that!"

"Well, I never!" said Biggins, in astonishment—"d—n my eyes, if I did."

Biggins always resorted to this condemnatory allusion to the eyes when he was at a loss to express his feelings.

"Well," said Ralph, "don't stand gaping there, but just tell me whether we can put up here."

"Oh, yes, certainly, sir," said Biggins, who was beginning to regard Ralph as a great man. "Well, I never!" he went on, half to himself. "I always thought that Forncett was one of his sort!"—pointing his thumb over his shoulder in the usual way towards Frowde's place—"a regular shabby lot in their seedy old coats, with their old books about the place. Well, I never!"

Lord Medway's servants were much amused. Lords were to them so common that they did not always think it necessary to use the appellation when talking in private, and "Young Medway" and "Old Ravensbourne's" merits were often discussed in the kitchen.

Old Biggins went waddling about as lively as possible, delighted at the idea of showing all his old cronies, as they came in for their glass of ale and the newest bit of scandal, the coach and horses of Lord Medway.

The servants, seeing that Biggins regarded them as great men, did not fail to take advantage of it, and during the next few days they were treated to anything and everything they liked at the Pleiades. They certainly made good use of the hospitality offered, though they agreed between themselves that what was supplied to them was "beastly stuff," and that the inhabitants of Copse Hill evidently did not know what good liquor was, or they'd never stand it. They, on the other hand, treated the villagers to such a history of the ways and

doings of the nobility, and spoke with such familiarity of great lords, that they left subject for gossip to last nearly all through the coming winter.

When the servants returned to The Birches, and Frank had disposed of his various visitors in their rooms to get ready for dinner, he thought he would run across to Winterslow to tell them of his arrival. At least, that is what he persuaded himself was his reason for going.

"If there ain't the master off at once over the way," said Ralph to Mary as he went into the kitchen.

"And I only hope he'll be back in time, and not spoil the dinner," said Mary, who was too anxious to show what she could do in the way of cooking, to care at that moment either about Ralph or her master.

The master, meanwhile, has received a welcome at Winterslow, and is disappointed to hear of the visit to town. It will spoil all the fun, he says, so he begs them to come in that evening after dinner. Leonora asks to be omitted in the invitation, but Frank will not hear of it, and she is easily persuaded to go.

Kate, who is in very low spirits at having to go to London because she is expecting her Jack home soon, cheers up at the idea of going out after dinner, and wonders why Leonora is so easily persuaded to join them.

"Why, mamma," she says, "you're getting quite gay. I do so like Mr. Forncett. What a pity you can't marry him, isn't it?"

"Hush, child," said Leonora, "we don't want to marry, we are only very great friends."

Kate turned this over in her mind as she stood pulling on her glove, and she fastened and unfastened the button in a fidgetty way two or three times, and then she said—

"Mamma, at what age do people leave off being in love?"

"You silly little Kate, asking such questions; what do you know about love?"

Kate was very much inclined to say she knew a good deal about it, but she felt she must keep her great secret a little longer, till Jack came home.

"Don't you bother your little head about such matters," said Leonora.

But the question troubled Leonora, and rather interfered with the resolution she had just made up in her own mind that she would try to crush out the love from her heart, and look upon Frank simply as a friend.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A MERRY MEETING.

The play, so to speak, of a graceful and intelligent woman, is the most charming thing in the world. She is the consummate flower of creation. The light of her eyes, the movement of her lips, the tones of her voice, are all worth watching; her easy chat has no wisdom in it, mayhap, nor any wit, yet is as fresh as dew and as fragrant as may-bloom; she brings to a manly and poetic mind the same pleasure—in a higher degree—as that produced by a summer landscape, with emerald grass and translucent water, and birds in full song amid the airy branches of the trees.

THE party that the Temples found congregated at The Birches consisted of Frank Forncett, his brother Charles, Earl of Ravensbourne, Charles Forncett the younger, by courtesy Lord Medway, Harry Rivers, and Lord Arun, the latter being for the present Lord Medway's most particular friend.

Leonora had met Lord Ravensbourne at Temple Cloud many years ago: how many need not be counted, as his lordship remarked when he paid her a compliment on her youthful appearance.

Introductions were made, and everyone was soon at ease. Kate was flattered and petted by all.

"Sweet girl, Frank. Like the mother, I suppose," said Lord Ravensbourne.

"I don't know, I never saw Mrs. Temple. They were at Constantinople when I used to visit Temple Cloud."

"What a fool you were to miss that woman, Frank! What a grand creature she is! Why doesn't she get a divorce from that scoundrel Lifton, and then there might be some chance for you. For you know you're not an old man yet, Frank."

"Hush! don't speak of Lifton in that way while young Arun is within hearing," said Frank. "He turned round as you mentioned the name."

"Oh! Val is no lover of his cousin. The poor boy is always lamenting over some widow that it seems Lifton prevented him from marrying. He played him some rascally trick over it. Whether he wanted her for himself, I can't say, but she was probably some designing creature, old enough to be Val's mother, and whatever Lifton's conduct may have been, I daresay it was the best thing that could happen for Val.

though he doesn't think so. So young hopeful has cut his Mentor and cousin for the present."

"Infamous man!" said Frank, alluding to Lifton.

"Well," said the Earl, "he is simply a man who walks coolly through life, knocking down every obstacle in his way, without the slightest regard to anyone's feelings. I suppose there are many like him."

"I hope not," said Frank. "He has spoilt the lives of several people, and will probably spoil many more. Well, Harry," he said, turning to Harry Rivers, "I wonder whether you are still as eager to come and settle down in a cottage here, and nail up roses and honeysuckles to your walls, and live amongst these primitive villagers, as you were this time last year."

Harry laughed; he had tasted life a little, and, to tell the truth, he was not quite so anxious for the way of living which had seemed so fascinating to him.

"My friend Temple here," Frank proceeded, "has taken the house which, you remember, Miss Tattleton thought would suit you. I think she offered to find you a wife also, didn't she?"

"Yes," said Harry, laughing, "I believe she offered me a choice of seven. But really," said Harry, seriously, "I never shall forget the day when we first came in sight of this village. I thought I had never seen a prettier spot. All looked so peaceful and happy, and it seemed impossible that there could be wickedness or malice or ill-feeling in such a place. There was the picturesque inn, with its portly landlord, and the village shop, with its buxom shop-woman; and there was that fine fellow, Manly Frowde, looking like the poetic spirit of the place, wandering about with his book, and followed by his splendid dog."

"Yes, Harry thought he had found Arcadia," said Frank. "Do you," turning to Temple, "find it all as Harry describes?"

"I can hardly say I do," said Temple, remembering his interview of the morning.

While this conversation is going on, Lord Medway and Lord Arun are talking together.

"I say, by Jove! you know—uncommonly pretty creature." Lord Arun was speaking of Kate.

"Yes," said his companion, "she's not amiss."

"'Pon honour, Charlie, she reminds me of some one—don't you know—so uncommon-like. By Jove! she has

just the same ways, don't you know. She might be her sister."

"Who *are* you talking about, Val?"

"Why, you know—don't you know—when that fellow Lifton, you know—when I was so cut up."

"Now, Val, you know that's a subject I won't stand. I was hoping you had forgotten all about the widow."

But Lord Arun had not by any means forgotten the widow. When he went to Paris in search of her, and could not find her, he returned to England, and left no stone unturned till he traced her to her hiding-place in Rowell St. Dunstan. Hearing where she was, immediately, in the joy of his heart, he told his cousin Arundel Lifton.

Now whether Lifton really wanted to do a good action for once in his life, and save the boy from making a fool of himself, or whether he liked practising cruelty on Flora, it is difficult to determine; but he acted with prompt severity on this occasion. He managed to keep Lord Arun from going at once to Rowell by appointing to go with him in a few days. He then went down himself, obtained an interview with Flora, and easily managed to make her promise to leave Rowell immediately, and never marry Lord Arun. He came back to Valentine, told him that Flora had left, and that it was useless for him to think of marrying her, as she was a disreputable character, and had, morover, a husband living.

Lord Arun, who would not tell a lie himself, implicitly believed his cousin, and tried to forget Flora.

Before he had succeeded in banishing her from his mind, a letter reached him which brought back his love tenfold.

Whatever there was good in Flora, and there is some good in all of us, it had been developed by Lord Arun. He trusted her so completely, and was so thoroughly honourable, that he woke up a sense of goodness in her. He did not treat her as a toy or plaything, as other men did. She was not in love, for she had been once, and once only, and that was with Arundel Lifton. All she cared for since he left her was to have the admiration of men. She had played the same game with Lord Arun as with other men. She tried to gain his admiration, and easily succeeded; but she found some new feeling rising within her. She began to be ashamed of the power of attraction on which she had hitherto prided herself; she began to wish that she had led an honourable life that she might be worthy of this man who was so true and good to her. Then she determined that she would not disgrace him

by marrying him, but would get out of his way, and atone for the past. For this reason she went to Rowell. When Lifton found her there, she saw the importance of keeping out of Lord Arun's way, and left at once; but she was anxious to show the man she so much admired that he had been the means of making her a better woman, and she felt that, before parting for ever from Lord Arun, she would like to be honest with him and tell him all her story; so, after many attempts at a letter, she sent the following:

"DEAR LORD ARUN,

"Mr. Lifton came to warn me to keep out of your way, and to make me promise never to marry you. It was unnecessary, as I had made up my mind to it before. I daresay he told you what a wicked creature I have been, and by this time you must hate me; but, dear Lord Arun, I want you not to hate me, but pity me. When I first saw you, I only wanted to make you admire me. I lived only for admiration; but I found you so true and good that I was sorry I had made you love me.

"I am not fit to be in your thoughts for a moment, but do pity me. When I tell you who it was that ruined me, I know you will pity me. You know what his power is. Your cousin, Mr. Lifton, was the only man I ever loved, and he took me away from my husband when I was very young, and then cruelly left me. I am divorced from my husband and am quite alone in the world, without a name, or position, or friends.

"Do not tell Mr. Lifton what I have told you, or he will only find me out, and be more cruel to me. I seem never to be able to get out of reach of his cruelty. I am frightened of him. I am going to shut myself up away from everyone, and make up for my wicked life, but I shall always think of you as the kindest and best man I have ever met. Think of me with pity, and as a poor little woman, with no other name than

"FLORA."

This letter roused Lord Arun to a high state of indignation. Lifton had the reputation of having ruined so many women that it did not occur to him to inquire which one this was. He swore he would never speak to Lifton again in his life, and he spared neither money nor pains in making search for Flora. Young Lord Medway was his particular friend at this time, and in him he confided. He spent the greater part of

his time in lamenting Flora, and denouncing Lifton. Valentine had never made any secret of his love for Flora, and Lord Medway openly chaffed him about it, so the remark that "Arun's pretty widow has disappeared, and Lifton had something to do with it," went the round of Lord Arun's friends, and Lifton was credited with one more victim.

Lord Medway had succeeded in making Valentine talk and think less of Flora; indeed he had at last absolutely refused to listen to either laments of Flora or denunciations of Lifton. So on this evening, when Valentine was reminded by Kate of Flora, he thought he would put a stop to the subject at once, and seeing his father disengaged at that moment, he joined him.

"Uncle Frank seems snug down here, doesn't he, father? And he's got some charming neighbours, too, it seems. We shall hear of the old boy marrying next."

"I'll tell you a secret, my boy," said the Earl. "You remember you've sometimes heard us joke about your uncle having had a love-disappointment in his youth?"

"Yes," said the boy, "I've heard some sort of tradition about it, but thought it was all fun."

"That is the lady," said the Earl, looking in the direction of Leonora.

"By Jove! what a fine woman! What an aunt she'd have been for a fellow! One might be proud of her. But tell me, who is she now? They introduced her as Temple's sister, didn't they? Is she married?"

"Hush! don't speak too loudly. Come closer. She married that scamp Lifton."

"What!" said Charlie. "Poor Val's *bête noire?* I didn't know he was married."

"The scandal was hushed up long ago, and is forgotten. Lifton went away with Temple's wife, the mother of that pretty little girl, and Temple's sister has lived with him ever since. I remember something of it all at the time; but Frank has just been telling me all about it. It was odd they should meet again in this quiet corner of the world."

"By Jove! it *is* odd!" said Charlie; "but what I lament is that I've lost that handsome aunt. 'Pon my word, I'm almost in love with her myself! Why doesn't she get divorced from that man?"

"She isn't the woman to do that sort of thing," said the Earl. "You can see she would bear any trouble nobly."

When the party dispersed in the evening, and Frank's

guests retired to their rooms, Lords Medway and Arun sat over their bedroom fire together. To provide for visitors and servants, all available space had been used at The Birches, and a bed was made for Lord Arun in the dressing-room attached to his friend's bedroom.

With Ralph "the Earl" was a great man, not so much because he was an Earl, but that he was his master's brother, and the "young lord" whom Ralph had known since he was a boy, was also an object of veneration. He had always studied his tastes, and knew how to administer to his wants, from the jam tarts of boyhood to the brandy and soda and cigars of the present time.

Therefore just as the two young men had sat down for a chat, Ralph appeared with a tray containing various articles which he thought might be wanted.

"Well, Ralph," said Lord Medway, "you and the master have settled down very comfortably here, eh?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ralph; "the place is small, but it suits us." Ralph always included himself with his master.

"And you've some charming neighbours, eh, Ralph?" he said, with a sly twinkle in his eye. "You'll have to take care of the master."

"Well, sir," said Ralph, "I've taken care of him all these years, but there's no knowing what may happen to a man when once he gets the female folk about him. They do twist and turn a man about;" and Ralph looked rather sad as he said this.

"Why, Ralph, I shall begin to think you are bitten yourself, you are so serious about it, and we shall be having you and the master both married."

"Not I," said Ralph, who had been considerably "twisted and turned," as he expressed it, by Mary, but whose supremacy he was not going to acknowledge even to himself. "Not I. I keep clear of them, thank God!"

When the young men were alone, Valentine began talking of Kate again, and Lord Medway, instead of stopping him this time, encouraged him. He did not know that there was any connection between Kate and Flora. There had been so many scandals connected with Arundel Lifton that it did not occur to him that this particular one had anything to do with Flora. Besides, he imagined that Kate's mother must by this time be a middle-aged woman, and he always thought of "Arun's pretty widow" as a young woman. He saw that Arun was very much taken with Kate, and he fancied that he

might perhaps forget the widow if he was encouraged to think of Kate. So they discussed her merits and beauty in somewhat horsey language, perhaps, as young men are apt to do when they admire horses and women indiscriminately, and have never learnt to regard either seriously.

"And what did you think of the other woman?" said Lord Medway presently.

"Temple's sister, wasn't she? I couldn't quite make out the relationship between them. That's one of those things, you know, I never can make out."

"You'll make out what relation she is to you, though, when I tell you," said Lord Medway.

"Relation to me! 'Pon honour, I know nothing about her. What do you mean, you know?"

"What I mean is that she is Arundel Lifton's wife—your cousin's wife."

"The wife of that infernal scamp? By Jove! I say, you know, you must be chaffing me, Charlie."

"No, Val, honour bright, the pater has been telling me all about it to-night. I didn't know he was married."

"I knew he had been married, and left his wife years ago, before I can remember, don't you know? but I didn't know who she was, or whether she was alive. I say, Charlie, ain't it a shame?"

"What's a shame?" said Charlie.

"Why, to leave that splendid creature, you know. 'Pon honour, if he wasn't such a cool devil, I'd like to thrash him, you know. But there's no managing him. He's a regular fiend. What did he leave her for?"

"Oh! as usual, to run off with another fellow's wife. He took her brother's wife, on that occasion, and the two deserted ones have lived together ever since, and brought up the girl that has taken your fancy to-night."

Now, Lord Arun's brain did not move very quickly, and he began slowly turning all this over in his mind, as he undressed and got into bed, and occasionally he jerked out questions to Charlie, which did not seem to have any connection.

"How old is she?" he shouted to Charlie, in the other room.

"Who?" said Charlie.

"Why, Miss Temple, don't you know?"

"Eighteen, I should think."

After a few minutes' silence, Valentine shouted again.

"What became of her?"

"Why, went home and went to bed, I should say."

"No, I don't mean that, you know. I mean, don't you see, what did that scoundrel do with her when he took her away?"

"What, Lifton you mean? Oh, you'd better ask him. Got a good many to account for, I should say. A regular Blue Beard, only didn't marry 'em first, as the other monster did."

"I say, Charlie," said Val, after he had been in bed some minutes, "what was the name of Temple's wife, maiden name, you know?"

"Temple's wife be hanged, Val, and you too! Do go to sleep, like a Christian. I'd just got off."

But Val did not go to sleep. He had begun to work the question out in his mind, and it flashed upon him that Flora was Kate's mother. And he was not happy about it. Kate seemed to him a contemporary of his own, for a girl of eighteen is equal to a boy of twenty-two; and it seemed impossible that the fairy-like Flora, with her pretty face and yellow hair, could be nearly old enough to be his mother. Then the jokes of some of his friends about her age came to his mind: and then he thought of the fresh and pure Kate. Val thought over it for hours. He had never had such a thinking fit in his life. He woke up in the morning a sadder and a wiser man. He was no longer in love, but he was full of pity for the woman whose life had been so wrecked. He pictured her a fresh young girl, as Kate now was, falling into the snares of a fiend, like Arundel Lifton. He had always been rather frightened of his cousin, but he had no fear now; he determined to face him, and compel him to join him in taking means to make the life of poor little Flora less miserable.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHAT THE VILLAGE SAID.

No might nor greatness in mortality
Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny
The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong
Can tie the gall up in the slandrous tongue?
Measure for Measure.

MR. TEMPLE departed for town next morning, with Leonora and Kate, leaving a letter in the post-office directed to Mrs. Marston Sebright.

This letter, and also the Rev. Vypar Voyd, reached Ashton Minima the next day.

"My dear Mr. Voyd, I owe you a thousand thanks for all you have done," said Mrs. Sebright. "You have been the salvation of my boy. See this note from Mr. Temple. He evidently understands what is the matter, and is removing his daughter out of Jack's way. How very sensible he must be."

"Most sensible," said the vicar, as he read the note, which ran as follows:

"MADAM,

"I understand that you wished a message conveyed to me through the Rev. Vypar Voyd, concerning the acquaintance between your son and my daughter. They met at the house of my friend Mr. Frowde, and no doubt the *badinage* usual amongst young folk has passed between them. But that there is nothing serious so far as my daughter is concerned I am certain, as she confides everything in me. I need scarcely remark that no reliance should be placed on village gossip.

"I am compelled to be away from home for some little time, so your anxiety regarding your son may be allayed so far as my daughter is concerned.

"I am, Madam,
"Your obedient servant,
"WILLIAM TEMPLE."

"Most sensible, indeed," repeated the vicar, as he read the note a second time, for his brain did not take it all in at first. "I thought I should succeed in showing him how necessary it was to interfere. He has evidently taken her away on purpose. I found him rather difficult to persuade at first; but I used my best endeavours—my very best endeavours—I can assure you, Mrs. Sebright."

"And I am most grateful to you," replied the lady. "I can never repay you."

The vicar remained some time. He did not tell Mrs. Sebright of his mistakes of the previous day; but he did tell her a great deal about what he termed the "excessively unbecoming conduct of Miss Temple." It was agreed that Kate was got out of the way just in time, as Jack was expected home shortly with the doctor, who was asked to stay at Ashton Minima for a couple of days on his way to town.

The vicar went home rejoicing. He had been half afraid of the result of an interview between Temple and Mrs. Sebright; but that letter was all he could wish.

And now gossip was more rife than ever in the village.

Miss Temple had "done something wrong, and was suddenly taken away by her father," was the current report, and "not to be wondered at when the father was no better than he should be," said some; and young Mr. Sebright was "mixed up with it," or Mr. Frowde, or Mr. Forncett, or all of them, according to some.

This was the talk amongst the lower classes, and amongst as much of the upper as condescended to that sort of thing.

But there was a grand buzzing amongst the upper classes, the small gentry, and clergy of the neighbourhood. The occupant of The Birches was positively a nobleman's son, they had just found out, and scarcely anyone had called on him. What had they all been doing not to know this? He was actually the Honourable Frank Forncett, and his card was not lying on any of their tables.

"How could I have made such a mistake?" said old Mrs. Ashley, who thought she had the peerage at her fingers' ends.

"Reach me 'Debrett,'" she said to her daughter, "and let us look it up."

"Here it is," she said, laying the book on her lap, and pointing to the name with one hand, while she carefully arranged her eye-glasses with the other. "'Forncett. Family name of the Earl of Ravensbourne.' Now let us turn to Ravensbourne. Here it is. 'Ravensbourne, Earl of. Charles Forncett, fourth Earl, born 1830. Brother living, Frank, unmarried.' Just take it, Patricia, my dear, and read it all out to me."

Her daughter took the volume, and read it out from beginning to end.

"Of course, now I remember all about it, but had forgotten the family name. Why, he married a second cousin of the second wife of Sir Watkin Ashley, of Protheli."

The Ashleys, who had in former times married into Welsh families, and had some Welsh blood in them, were great at relationships, and could nearly always prove that they were in some way connected with any noble family that was mentioned.

"Patricia, my dear," she said to her daughter, "we'll leave cards."

And as Mrs. Ashley was considered to be the head of the very small country gentry who constituted what they were pleased to term "society" round Copse Hill, Frank Forncett was in a fair way to get into the exclusive set, supposing he wished to do so.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN ENTANGLEMENT.

ASTROLOGOS: Pick up your thread.
ALOUETTE: I did not know it fell, papa.
ASTROLOGOS: How like a prosy talker, who, oblivious,
Lets fall his story's thread, and plodding ignorant,
Pursues his wordy way until entanglement
Breaks off his luckless speech.
ALOUETTE: I'm sure such accident
Ne'er happens to a woman's conversation though.

The Comedy of Dreams.

DR. ONESIMUS SUTTON and the Rev. Marston Sebright are sitting over the dinner-table at Ashton Minima on a chilly evening late in the autumn. Jack has left the "old boys," as he irreverently termed them, to enjoy their filberts and port and theology. But it is *not* theology they are discussing. Jack is with his mother in the drawing-room. He does not look happy, for the day before he left Devonshire he had a note from Mrs. Frowde, telling him of Kate's departure. He could not make out what this sudden movement meant. Kate had sent messages through Mrs. Frowde, in which she talked confidently of seeing him when he came home, and now she had suddenly gone, and did not seem to know when she would be back. There must be something wrong in it. Mrs. Sebright was in good spirits, not only at having her son back again, but because she imagined that any intercourse between him and Kate was effectually stopped. She talked cheerfully with him for some time, carefully avoiding any mention of either Mr. Voyd or the Frowdes.

She questioned Jack about Devonshire and Dr. Sutton, but Jack only answered mechanically, and she found it difficult to keep up her cheerful tone.

After a few minutes' silence, Jack said—

"Has Mr. Voyd been here much, mother?"

"I think he has called three or four times while you were away, my dear. He always inquired most anxiously after you. He's a true friend of yours, Jack."

"I'm not so sure of that, mother."

"My dear boy, no one could be more anxious for your welfare than he is. Believe me, Jack, he is as anxious as myself about you."

"I should prefer a little less anxiety on his part," said Jack.

"Really, Jack, I'm afraid you are very much altered. You used not to talk like this."

"When did he last come, mother?"

"About ten days ago, my dear."

"Oh!" said Jack, in a curious tone.

He was wondering whether that visit had anything to do with the departure of the Temples.

"I shall go over to Copse Hill when the doctor's gone," said Jack. "It won't do to go before, as I shall stay the night. The days are so short, and the lanes across there are probably bad, and Frowde will give me a bed, I know."

"Jack, my dear boy, do let me persuade you not to visit those people."

"You must let me judge for myself, mother. You know nothing about them but by hearsay: I know them well, and I know and feel that it is a privilege to have the friendship of such a man as Manly Frowde. I should never have gone into the Church but for him. I am learning from him to distinguish truth from humbug, and honesty from hypocrisy, and I can say without hesitation that Mr. Voyd is a humbug."

Jack's voice had reached a tone of great indignation as he finished his sentence.

"Hush hush, Jack," said his mother, "how can you use such language to me, and of such a man? Jack, you are making your mother very miserable."

She said this in so earnest a way that Jack felt remorseful. He went and stood over her and kissed her, and said,

"Dear mother, forgive me. I did not intend to hurt you. I cannot help feeling very strongly when I hear a weak fellow like Voyd passing judgment on a man like Frowde. But, mother, let us settle the question by appealing to my father.

If he says it is advisable for me to give up the acquaintance of the Frowdes, I will do so."

Mrs. Sebright did not want the matter referred to her husband. She had, acting on Mr. Voyd's advice, not mentioned the matter to him at all, and she always felt a little guilty about it, and dreaded the time when it might all come out; so she said,

"No, Jack, I see no use in doing that, because your father knows nothing of Mr. Frowde's private character. He only knows him as a public man. It is his private character unfits him for your society, and you are likely to make very undesirable acquaintances at his house. Jack—dear Jack—you used to be so different before you knew those people; you used to tell me everything, and now you scarcely ever talk to me. You cannot see what a difference has come over you. You never mention whom you meet when you go to see those people, and that shows you are ashamed to do so."

"How can you say so, mother? You know I continually talk about the people I meet there, for I never meet any so nice anywhere else."

"But, Jack, who are those Temples you meet, that Mr. Voyd mentioned to you the last time you were home?"

"Everybody knows Mr. Temple. I daresay if you ask father he knows all about him."

"Yes, my dear, his public character; but what of his private character?"

"Well, I suppose it is the same as other people's. I should say he was a very upright and severe man in private life. I know I feel rather frightened of him." Which was true, or he might have gone straight to him at first when he fell in love with little Kate, and have saved her and himself much unhappiness.

"But what of Mrs. Temple?" said Mrs. Sebright.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing her," said Jack, "but hope to know her soon."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Sebright, with a shudder. "And Miss Temple?"

"She is the sweetest and brightest lady I ever met," said Jack.

"Oh! Jack, Jack, what are you saying? Do you know she is the common talk of the neighbourhood. Her name is in everyone's mouth in connection with several gentlemen: yourself amongst the number, I grieve to say, Jack."

"Mother," almost shouted Jack, "I cannot—I will not stand this, even from you. This is too much." And he got up,

and walked excitedly out of the room. Mrs. Sebright very soon followed him. She knew her son well, and she saw he was really upset. She threw down her knitting, and walked quickly upstairs. Her knitting cotton had become entangled in the fringe of a little shawl she had thrown over her shoulders; but in her anxiety she did not notice this, so she drew the thread all the way up with her. She went to Jack's door, but for the first time in her life she was refused admittance. She begged him to let her come in; but Jack would give no answer.

Meanwhile, Marston Sebright and Dr. Sutton, both comfortably filled with good port, left the dining-room and walked across to the drawing-room, which they did not enter with their usual dignity.

"Hallo! what's all this?" said Mr. Sebright, catching hold of the doctor to prevent himself from falling. "What's happened? My feet are entangled in a cat's cradle."

He looked round the room, so soon as he could get disentangled, and saw the knitting lying on the ground, and a paper and paper-knife which Jack had thrown down in the middle of the room. Mrs. Sebright hearing the noise, ran down, with a face that added to the general look of confusion. Mrs. Sebright was usually a very placid-looking woman. She would go on in the same regular way from one year's end to another. She was seldom out of temper, and scarcely ever changed the expression of her countenance. Therefore, when her husband saw her, he felt more astonished than ever, and said,

"What can be the matter, my dear? The doctor and I have had to make a most undignified entrance to this room. We found our feet surrounded by some stringy material. I hope, doctor, I did not seriously inconvenience you?"

"Not at all," said the doctor.

"Jack is not very well," said Mrs. Sebright, "and has retired to his room. I went up to see if I could do anything for him, and unfortunately carried my knitting thread entangled in my shawl. I'm so sorry, Dr. Sutton, to have so nearly caused you an accident."

"Don't mention it, madam."

"Jack ill!" said Mr. Sebright, "why, he seemed well enough at dinner. What is the matter?"

"Nothing more than a headache, I think; I daresay he will be well by the morning," said Mrs. Sebright.

But Mr. Sebright, who was unused to so much agitation in

the house, could see that there was something more than a headache. He thought that the mother would not care to make the doctor uncomfortable by showing too much anxiety, and he knew the boy would be safe in her hands, so he said nothing more about it.

Mrs. Sebright went to bed early, leaving her husband and Dr. Sutton in the drawing-room. As she passed her son's door, she asked once more to be allowed to come in; but she received no answer.

Later on, when Mr. Sebright had seen the doctor to his room, he went to his son's room, intending to open the door softly and have a look at him, as he had been accustomed to do every night when Jack was a boy, but he found the door locked.

"Jack's door locked! How very singular! He never used to lock it. My dear," he said, going into his bedroom, "the boy's door is locked!"

But Mrs. Sebright, having begun this bit of deceit with her husband, felt compelled to go on, so she pretended to be asleep to avoid explanations, and Mr. Sebright got no answer to his remark.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JACK INDIGNANT.

They say—quhat say they? Let them say.—*Old Scottish Motto.*

When Jack shut himself in his room, he threw himself into a chair and held his head with both hands, as if he almost felt it was necessary to hold his reason in. The one woman in the world whom he loved above everything, who seemed so divine a creature to him that she was something more than a mere woman, was spoken of as a common creature, and that by his mother. The thought was too horrible. For a few moments he hated his mother, and felt as if he would like never to look on her again.

He thought of his beautiful, innocent little Kate, who seemed so pure and good to him that he considered it sacrilege to think of her when not surrounded by congenial influences. He used to like to get out into the open country,

where he could hear nothing but the song of birds and feel nothing but the presence of God, and think about Kate, and think and think till he almost fancied he had her spirit with him. Whenever he had any little annoyance, he used to fancy he could shake it off by getting away to "talk to Kate," as he called it. He had set her up as a divinity, and now his divinity was spoken of as the lowest of creatures.

He tossed his head about wildly, and then paced up and down the room, and then again sank into the chair, and threw his strong body from one position to another, and seemed as if he would grasp at some imaginary foe. He wanted to exhaust his rage and strength on something, and knew not what. He felt his head burning and his mouth dry, and an intense desire to clutch at something with his hands. He opened the window and put his head out, and the cool air sobered him a little. Then he drank water and bathed his head, and sat down to try to think.

But it was a long time before he could think calmly. He called to his little Kate, and tried to imagine that she would come, in spirit, to help him, but every time he thought of her, he also thought of the vile accusations against her, and was wild with rage. He never doubted her for one moment. Then he tried to persuade himself to be calm and look at the matter quietly, and see what was to be done, for perhaps Kate was herself suffering from the vile charges. The time was so near now that he could have gone to Mr. Temple and offered himself as a husband for Kate, and all this would now take away his chances. Lovers always exaggerate their difficulties, and it seemed to Jack that this was a very serious difficulty.

By the time that he had made up his mind what was the best thing to do under the circumstances, it was four o'clock. He wished it were light, that he might at once carry his resolution into effect, for he meant to start at daybreak and go to see Manly Frowde and tell him all about it, and ask his advice. He undressed, and tried to get a couple of hours' sleep, but it was impossible. At seven o'clock he turned out, went to the stables, and had Bessie out. He left a message for his mother that he hoped Dr. Sutton would excuse him, but he had a severe headache from the railway journey of the day before, and had gone out for a long ride to shake it off. When this message was repeated at the breakfast table, Mr. Sebright looked as if he thought something unusual had happened, but he said nothing, as Dr. Sutton was present.

Jack found Manly Frowde just turned out of bed, feeding his pigeons and looking as happy and bright as ever, followed by his big dog.

"Here you are," said Jack, "looking as happy and well as ever, with your wife and dog by your side as usual, I was going to say, but I suppose the wife is not down yet."

"No, she is upstairs waiting to know the result of the post," and he produced a bundle of unopened letters and papers from his pocket.

"You always look so happy; you never seem to have any difficulties in life. The world comes easily to you." He said this so sadly that Frowde guessed there was something the matter.

"Of course I'm happy," said Frowde. "Difficulties are plentiful enough with me, but then, they were made to be overcome, and there is a certain amount of pleasure to be derived from overcoming them. Aren't you happy also, my dear boy? or are you pining for your little lady-love, who has been carried away just as you have come to look after her? You'll be running away with her altogether, I suppose, soon."

But Manly Frowde saw that his pleasant chaff did not make Frank look less unhappy, and he inquired what was the matter. Jack told the whole story.

"Well," said Frowde, "I've a pretty little romance to tell you which will certainly relieve your mind a little, and give you an opportunity of making an answer to your mother. My wife has been wishing to tell you for some time, as she knew it would interest you, but was waiting till you came."

He then related the history of the Temples.

"As to our little Kate," continued Frowde, "she is the purest and sweetest little woman in the world. I should like to know who has slandered her. If it's a man I'll horsewhip him. If it's a woman or a parson—well—" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I fear it's a parson," said Jack.

"And I daresay the parson had it from a woman," said Manly Frowde.

"What had I better do?" said Jack.

"Talk to the missus about it, she understands these matters better than I do," Manly Frowde had great faith in his wife.

The result of a talk with "the missus" was that Jack decided to tell his father of his engagement to Kate, so soon as Dr. Sutton should have left them.

Jack breakfasted at the Cottage, and was so cheered by his

friends that he started home again in good spirits. Bessie found out the difference in her master, and as good spirits are catching, she cantered along gaily, and seemed by her manner to tell her master he need not despair, as everything was sure to come right in the end.

He arrived home early in the afternoon and found his mother alone, as Mr. Sebright and the doctor had gone out.

"Jack!" said his mother. "How could you leave the house in that way this morning without a word to me, when you know what I suffered last night. I know where you have been. To those people again. You used to tell me everything once. Now you always go to them for consolation. I can quite understand what Mr. Voyd means. They are fascinating, wicked people. They are separating a son from his mother. You are breaking my heart, Jack."

"My dear mother, do listen to me. I am no longer a boy, unable to judge for myself. There must come a time when I must use my own judgment. You are shut up here and see little of the world. You really know nothing of the Frowdes. You are influenced entirely by Mr. Voyd, who is, no doubt, a most zealous and estimable man, but he lets his zeal carry him too far occasionally, and he has an unfortunate habit of listening to and encouraging gossip. You reproach me, mother, for being influenced by the Frowdes, but I think I may reproach you for believing Mr. Voyd before you believe me."

"My dear Jack," replied his mother, "I am sure you don't thoroughly understand Mr. Voyd's motives. He is as anxious for your welfare as I am."

"Excuse me, mother, I think I do understand Mr. Voyd's motives better than you do, probably, but we will not discuss them. We will suppose that he had the best intentions, and my welfare at heart, when he told you that the Frowdes were bad people, and the Temples were living in—well, what he termed, a breach of the Seventh Commandment. But in one case he has certainly made an unfortunate mistake, and, so far as my opinion goes, in the other also. Mr. Temple is divorced from his wife, and his sister, who is separated from her husband, lives under his protection."

"How very unfortunate for them," said Mrs. Sebright. But of course Mr. Voyd does not know that, and he has probably good authority for what he asserted."

"His authority is probably some gossiping woman," said Jack.

"Well, my dear, I'm truly sorry for these people," said

Mrs. Sebright; "but it's just as well not to be too intimate with them, for you know that sort of thing is not recognised in society, and it must materially alter their position."

"How intolerant you are, mother! It was for that reason they sought a quiet spot to settle in, where their troubles would not be known; but it seems they chose the very worst spot in the world, for with a gossip-loving parson, and a parish full of gossiping females, there's little chance for anyone to live in peace."

"Jack, it grieves me to think you misunderstand Mr. Voyd in this way," said Mrs. Sebright.

"It grieves me, also, mother, that you misunderstand him. It is evident that we shall never agree in our estimate of him. It seems to me that it is he who is separating us, not the Frowdes. Manly Frowde is the last man in the world to cause any division in families. If everyone listened to his teaching, there would be no quarreling in the world at all. But don't let us quarrel, mother. I've something serious to say to you. Come and sit down by me, mother," and he took her hand tenderly, and drew her down by his side. "You know, mother, I have always loved you better than anyone else in the world. No rival has ever come between us—unless it's Mr. Frowde," he added, laughing.

His mother, pleased with this little speech, for she was passionately fond of him, looked happy, and seemed to forget all her previous annoyance.

"Yes, dear Jack," she said.

"Well, mother, I said just now there comes a time when a man must use his own judgment: there also comes a time when a man meets the woman that he will love better than his mother. That time has come with me."

"Jack!" faintly said his mother. The smiles had died away from her face, and she looked pale. But she remembered it was selfish to want to keep Jack all to herself, so she tried to look pleasant, and said, "And who is the fortunate woman?"

"Miss Temple, mother."

"Jack, it cannot, it must not be," said Mrs. Sebright, starting from her seat. "You are mad! She is the common talk of every one."

"Mother, do not make me mad by saying such things. You have only the authority of Mr. Voyd."

"No, Jack, you are wrong. I have a letter from Mr. Temple that I can show you."

"A letter from Mr. Temple?" said Jack, in great astonishment. "What can you mean, mother?"

"I mean that Miss Temple's conduct has been such that her father has found it necessary to remove her suddenly from the neighbourhood, and he has written to apologise for her conduct to you."

"Mother, what can you mean?" Show it me, quick."

Poor Jack could hardly believe what he heard. There must be some dreadful mistake somewhere, he knew; but he could not make it out. While his mother went to fetch the letter, he was tormented with all sorts of fears. He never doubted Kate for a moment; but he wondered how much she knew of all this, and he pictured her suffering intensely, and yet he thought Mrs. Frowde would have known of it, and would have told him.

"Can Voyd have done all this?" he thought; "or is there some diabolical fiend at work?"

Mrs. Sebright placed the letter in his hands. He read it through with a look of wonder on his face. He re-read it.

"Good heavens, mother!" he exclaimed, "what have you been doing to call for such a letter as this? How can I ever dare to ask Mr. Temple for his daughter after that?"

"My dear Jack, you don't seem to see that what I have told you is true, and that Mr. Temple has found it necessary to remove his daughter."

"No, mother, I don't see it. What I do see is that Mr. Temple is a most perfect gentleman, and that you have been communicating with him in some way, and that he has tried to save any unpleasantness to you or his daughter by removing her. Now I see why they have suddenly gone away. This is your saintly parson's doing. He's spoilt my life, at least, for of course Mr. Temple will never condescend to let his daughter marry me after this. A curse on all scandal-mongers!"

"Hush! Jack. Do be calm. Listen to me for a moment. There are other proofs—actual proofs—of Miss Temple's misconduct."

"Mother, I will not listen to anything more. I have made up my mind on the subject. I will lay the whole matter before my father at once."

"At least wait till Dr. Sutton has gone," said his mother.

Mrs. Sebright was dreading the time when Jack should appeal to his father. She wished she had never kept it secret from him from the first.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A CURTAIN CONVERSATION.

But the best education of a young man is neither Greek nor Latin nor geometry; it has nothing to do with the siege of windy Troy, nor with the

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus,

nor with that long-legged isosceles triangle that bumptiously bestrides the asses' bridge. It is what a woman gives him. Sometimes it is the mother—always would it be so if mothers were not so terribly like hens with broods of ducklings—so frightfully afraid of the young gentleman's taking to bad practices without giving anybody notice.—M. C.

MRS. MARSTON SEBRIGHT did not pretend to be asleep that night when Mr. Sebright entered her room. She was unusually wide awake. She was dreading the consequences of Jack's appeal to his father, and she thought she might smooth tho way a little.

So, after some general remarks about Jack not looking well, and being dull, she said—

"I fear Jack has a very common disease—I think he has fallen in love."

"In love!" exclaimed Mr. Sebright. "The young rascal! I daresay he'll quickly fall out again. And who is the object of his love?"

"I fear it is a young lady whose character will not bear investigation," said his wife.

"Indeed! What is her name?"

"Temple," she replied.

"Temple—Temple. What Temple is it?" he asked.

"Daughter of a Mr. Temple, who came some months ago to live at Copse Hill."

"Temple!" he said again, as if in deep thought. "Oh, yes, of course I remember. 'Ah!" he continued, as if to himself, "clear-headed man that. Great loss in the political world. Made an unfortunate mess of his marriage, and retired into private life. His daughter, you say?" turning to his wife.

"Yes, and I fear from all accounts she is not at all what she should be."

"Never listen to accounts, my dear, but find out truth for yourself. I daresay Jack's quite able to choose for himself. But I suppose he's not serious about it, or I should know something of it."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Sebright. "I am afraid he has

made some very undesirable acquaintances at Copse Hill. Mr. Voyd does not give a very good account of some of his parishioners there."

"Voyd? Oh, yes, that's the young man who comes here sometimes. A very well-intentioned young man, but something of a fool. I'd rather see a boy like our Jack, wayward and diffident, unable to make up his mind, and with no confidence in himself; there's hope of such a boy in time. But these young puppies, who think they are going to reform the world, and begin by teaching their grandmothers and everybody else's grandmothers to suck eggs, do a great deal more harm than good. Better let the boy choose his own friends; he's not a bad judge, I should say. Instinct will help him. He's hardly arrived at the age of reason. If he makes a few mistakes, it will only give him experience; he'll soon find them out. If I chose his friends, I shouldn't choose that young parson."

This was very discouraging for Mrs. Sebright; her fears began to increase.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," she replied, "for I believe Mr. Voyd is a sincere friend of Jack's, and is truly anxious about him."

"What occasion is there for anxiety? The boy's chosen his career, and fulfilled my wishes. He's sure to go on all right now."

"But Mr. Voyd is exceedingly anxious about the people with whom he associates at Copse Hill. I can assure you, Marston, he has good cause to be anxious. Mr. Temple, for instance, may be a very clever man, but he is divorced from his wife, if there is nothing worse, and I have heard reports of something much worse, and that can hardly be called a desirable family to know."

"Mr. Temple has been very unfortunate, but I should imagine he was a man whom it is a privilege to know."

Mrs. Sebright began to think that everything was against her, and she wished over and over again that she had told her husband everything from the first. She had an absolute belief in her husband's judgment, and she wondered why she had allowed Mr. Voyd to persuade her to keep anything from him.

Mr. Voyd had attacked her on her one weak point. She was passionately fond of her son, and she was always a little nervous of what he might do, because she saw his wild, wayward disposition. She had, as it were, kept him tied to her

apron-string all these years, but she had used great tact to keep him so tied, and she dreaded the time when she should lose control over him, though she knew it must come. Unfortunately, when it came, there came also with it a *Deus ex machinâ*, in the form of the Rev. Vypar Voyd. Perhaps Jack Sebright would have considered him rather a *diabolus ex inferno*. Not caring for gossip herself, she could not understand the temptation that gossip-loving people have to distort facts and tell lies, and she believed implicitly all that Mr. Voyd told her.

Now that she heard her husband's remarks on the subject, she began to think how unwise she had been.

Therefore when she went to sleep that night she was very much happier concerning Jack, but trembled to think what her husband would say when he found how foolish she had been.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A STORMY EVENING.

The dull folk in an agricultural parish, if they see a lady walking with a gentleman, instantly whisper something wrong; the parson, if he is a young fool, brought into the world to disestablish the Church, picks up this faintly whispered gossip; after which that lady's life becomes a misery to her. As the wittiest Canon of St. Paul's remarked, the most dangerous animal to let loose among women is a wild curate.

M. C.

Dr. Sutton left Ashton Minima the next day, and the father, mother, and son sat down to dinner alone together for the first time. Marston Sebright looked happy and proud of his boy.

"Now, my boy," he said, when the filberts and port were on the table, "here's success to you. I hope I may live to see you well on the way to becoming a bishop like your grandfather, and may you be as good a man."

"Thank you, father. I don't suppose I shall ever be a bishop, or as good a man as my grandfather, but I'll try—at least, for the latter."

"And when we've found a living for you, I suppose you'll be wanting a wife, eh, Jack?"

"I suppose I shall," said Jack, trying to laugh and look unconcerned; but both he and Mrs. Sebright were feeling uncomfortable.

"A snug vicarage and a snug little wife, eh? But from what I hear you seem to have chosen the wife before the vicarage. Is it so?"

Jack was confused. He was not prepared to find that his father already knew all about it, and he had been wondering how he should tell him. He looked at his mother, intending to be angry with her, but she put so much expression into the glance she returned him, as if she would implore him to make the best of it, that he softened, and replied to his father—

"It is true that I have met the lady whom I should like to marry, but I fear her father will never give his consent."

"Nonsense, Jack! Young lovers always fear difficulties in their way. Any lady might be proud of you, my boy. Who is it? Come, tell me all about it."

"It is Miss Temple, daughter of a gentleman who lives at Copse Hill. I met her at Mr. Frowde's."

"Daughter of William Temple. Very good taste indeed, Jack, if the daughter is like the father. How old is she?"

"Nineteen, I think."

"Not old enough to know her own mind, but you can make up her mind for her if you choose. And have you proposed marriage to her?"

Jack hardly knew how to answer this question. He knew that, according to custom, he had no right to ask her to marry him without having previously asked her father's leave, and he thought his father would regard it in this light, and would blame him. At the same time he felt that he could not tell his father a lie, so he said,

"Yes, father; I know it is not the proper thing, but I have asked her, and I have not yet spoken to her father, because I was waiting till I had a home to offer her."

"Quite right, my boy. And does she accept you?"

"Yes," said Jack, but not at all in a cheerful tone.

"Well, then, I suppose there will be no difficulty with Mr. Temple. There is nothing objectionable in you, Jack—at least, that I can see. You are not positively ugly, you know," Mr. Sebright said, eying his son mischievously, "and I suppose we can manage to make such arrangements that a Mrs. Jack, and a limited number of little Jacks, can be provided for, can't we?"

"Thank you, father. But I fear there is an insuperable difficulty in this case."

"Nonsense, boy! Love gets over all difficulties, however insuperable. But tell me what is this 'insuperable difficulty'?"

"I fear some mischief has been made."

"Mischief! Mischief is only made by fools. Who has made mischief?"

Jack gave a glance at his mother. He almost hoped she would answer this question; but she showed no signs of doing so. She looked very anxious.

"I think perhaps Mr. Voyd has unintentionally said——"

"Mr. Voyd! Oh! he can do no harm. A well-meaning young man; but weak, Jack, decidedly weak. Anything he says would scarcely carry much weight."

"But he has managed to make very serious mischief," said Jack.

"How? Tell me."

Jack again looked across at his mother. If he had been alone with his father, he could have told him in a very few words all about it, and he would not have spared his opinion of Mr. Voyd; but he saw his mother looking anxiously at him, as if she begged him to spare Mr. Voyd and herself.

"Well, Voyd seems to have come here—and—he said he heard——" Jack could not get on.

"If it is simply a question of what somebody heard and somebody else said, it is not worth going into."

"But there's that unfortunate letter," said Jack.

"What letter?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Sebright, seeing the difficulty had now come, "Mr. Voyd, in his excess of anxiety for Jack, mentioned to me that he was not quite satisfied with the acquaintances that our boy was making at Copse Hill. He mentioned the Temples, particularly."

"What business is it of his?" said Mr. Sebright severely.

"Well, you see the Temples are his parishioners, therefore he must know something about them, and he is much interested in Jack."

"Why this sudden interest in Jack on his part? Are you particularly attached to him, Jack?"

Jack's shrug of the shoulders was sufficient answer.

"Mr. Voyd, in his zeal for Jack, may somewhat have exaggerated the faults of the Temples; but I fear they are hardly desirable as family connections."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Sebright. "A man's character must not be judged by his misfortunes. But what about this letter Jack mentions?"

"Mr. Voyd informed me that Miss Temple's conduct with Jack and other gentlemen was much commented on. I said I thought it a pity her father did not know of it, and Mr. Voyd seems to have called on Mr. Temple to inform him of it. I suppose Mr. Voyd must rather have conveyed the impression that I had sent a message to Mr. Temple, as that gentleman thought proper to write to me."

Jack looked very angry at this mention of Kate. He was crushing the empty nut-shells with his hands into atoms.

"Mr. Temple wrote to you?" said Mr. Sebright slowly, and in a tone of astonishment. "Why have I not heard of this before? Where is the letter?"

Mrs. Sebright had to fetch it.

Mr. Sebright read it through.

"Dear me," he said, "what can it all mean? Did you send a message to Mr. Temple?"

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Sebright, wishing to shield Mr. Voyd as well as herself, "Mr. Voyd seems rather to have misunderstood me."

"Really, my dear, it is a pity you ever encouraged this meddlesome young man. This letter really places the matter in a very awkward light. I agree with Jack that it is impossible to ask Mr. Temple after this; unless, indeed, the mischief can in any way be undone."

But Mrs. Sebright had in her heart a secret wish that the mischief should not be undone. She could not help thinking that there must be some foundation for what Mr. Voyd said, even if circumstances had been exaggerated, and she pictured Kate as a heartless young creature that had succeeded in infatuating her son. Moreover, with the British matron's notion of respectability, she could not get over the fact that Mr. Temple was divorced from his wife, and his sister separated from her husband. She was sorry for them, but would rather not have anything to do with them; and that her boy should marry into such a family was especially repugnant. So she said to her husband,

"I think, before you blame Mr. Voyd, you should find out whether there is any truth in what he says. You must remember he is acting only for Jack's good; he cannot himself be interested in any way. He tells me he has actual

proof of Miss Temple's misconduct, and I must say I think her father's letter tends to confirm this."

"That letter is simply the letter of a man who will not condescend to enter into details," said Mr. Sebright.

"I think you should see Mr. Voyd yourself, Marston, before deciding on anything. I know he possesses proof of Miss Temple's intimacy with a married man."

Jack looked unutterable things.

"I will not stand this, mother," said Jack, rising quickly.

"Don't be put out, my boy," said Mr. Sebright. "We'll make some inquiries before we go any further. I would rather not see Mr. Voyd, if I could help it, as I find him excessively irritating; but for your sake, I will. I'll drive over to Copse Hill, and then I may, at the same time, perhaps, have the pleasure of making the personal acquaintance of Mr. Frowde."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SECRET OUT.

Good night, good rest. Ah! neither be my share:
She bade good night that kept my rest away.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE Jack is in the greatest distress, for fear of losing his little lady-love, and for fear that she may be tormented with all the rumours about her, she is in London, happily unconscious of trouble, and only wishing that her father would go back to Winterslow that she might see Jack. There is no talk of going back yet, and she begins to fear that Jack will go away again before she sees him. She writes and expresses her fears to Mrs. Frowde, and Mrs. Frowde, knowing nothing of the letter that was Jack's stumbling-block, writes to tell Kate she may hear something of Jack from her father very soon, perhaps before her letter arrives.

Kate was in high glee when she had this news. She was longing to get rid of her secret, and she thought to herself that perhaps she would not have to keep it another day. And then she wondered what would happen. Would Jack come himself and ask her father, or would he write to him?

She hardly knew how to get through the day, wondering every moment what would happen. But the night came, and her father bade her "good night" in the usual way, and Kate went to bed disappointed.

"Surely it will happen to-morrow," she thought. But as the morrow passed and nothing happened, Kate became nervous.

"Is it possible papa can have refused him?" she thought. "No, I am sure he wouldn't refuse my Jack; he hasn't a fault, and he's a great deal too good for me."

She fretted herself into such a nervous state that at last she went to Leonora's room for consolation. She jumped on the bed and said,

"Mamma, darling, I can't sleep a bit to-night."

"Why, what's the matter, child?" said Leonora. "I've noticed how excitable you've been the last two or three days. Hadn't you better take some medicine?"

"No, it isn't medicine I want," said Kate, and she put her hand in Leonora's.

"Then what is it, dear?"

"I don't know."

"I don't think you do," Leonora said laughingly.

What is it that makes one feel inclined to be confidential at midnight? During the day it is easy enough to keep a secret, but at night one feels inclined to talk, especially on moonlight nights. On this night the moon was shining into Leonora's room, for she slept with her blinds drawn as she liked the light in the morning. The moonlight slanted across the bed just where Kate sat, casting a light on her blue dressing-gown, which she had thrown over her, and making it look an indescribable colour. She had tossed about so much on her pillow that her hair was in a tangled mess. As she sat there in the moonlight she looked a pretty little picture. And whether it was the moonlight, or what it was, it is impossible to say, but Kate found herself unable any longer to keep her secret.

"Mamma, darling."

"Yes."

"Do you think if anybody ever wanted me to marry him, and he found out about—about—you know what I mean—would he have me?"

"I should think he would. It would depend on who the 'he' was. But why do you trouble your little head about such things?"

Leonora had often anxiously asked herself this question, and she hoped it would never occur to Kate. Now she wondered what had put it into the child's head.

"If it was some one who loved me very much, would he mind?"

"I think you had better not trouble yourself about it till that some one comes, Katie dear."

"He *has* come, mamma, darling," and then Katie put her head down on the bed and began to cry.

Kate was not a girl to cry for trifles, but she had kept her secret for what seemed such a very long time to her, and the anxiety of the last two days had over-excited her brain, and caused her to think of all sorts of things that might have happened to prevent Jack from marrying her.

Leonora said nothing for a few minutes—it came on her so suddenly; and then it flashed upon her why Kate had been so sympathising about Frank.

Kate seemed a mere child to her, scarcely capable of knowing her own mind, and she was inclined to treat the matter at first with not much seriousness, and to laugh at Kate about her first little love affair. But she remembered that she was no older than Kate when Frank first loved her; and how much misery had she since suffered because she had not then encouraged him!

She soothed Kate as well as she could, and asked her to tell her all about it.

"You've not seen him, mamma, because you never go out, but it's Jack Sebright, that goes to see Mr. Frowde. I love him so much, and I've so longed to tell you about him."

"And why didn't you, darling?"

"Because he said I must keep it secret till he has got a church, because he's going to be a clergyman, you know."

"My poor child! So you've been keeping your secret, have you? Well, I daresay it will all come right in the end. How long ago was it?"

"In the summer, before he went away to study. And Mrs. Frowde says he's come back now, just as we have come away. Oh! I want to see him so much!"

"So Mrs. Fowde tells you all about him, does she?"

"Yes; when she writes she sends a little bit of paper inside her letter, to tell me news of Jack, because she knows all about it, because Jack talks to her. You're not angry, mamma darling, are you?"

"No, child; but it was silly of Mr. Sebright to wish any secrecy. Why didn't he ask your papa at once?"

"He was afraid to ask till he had got his church, because he said he had no position."

"That's how young people make mistakes," said Leonora, with a sigh; "and sometimes it becomes the mistake of a lifetime," she added.

"But, mamma," said Kate, "Mrs. Frowde, in her letter the other day, said that I should probably hear of Jack from papa; and I was so happy, because I thought it meant that Jack was going to ask papa. Do you think he has asked him?"

"I don't know, darling, but I'll speak to him to-morrow about it. Shall I?"

"Yes, please."

Kate, after some further consolation from Leonora, went to bed—and dreamt of all sorts of difficulties between Jack and herself.

When Leonora spoke about the matter to her brother the next day he was astonished, and somewhat angry that the child had kept it secret from him.

"It is utterly impossible," he said. "I will not allow my child to be received into a family where such a slur has been cast on her character. I hoped to save both you and her from the knowledge of what has been said, and it was for that I left Winterslow so suddenly."

He then related to her all the details of his interview with Mr. Voyd.

Poor Leonora was completely cast down. She had hoped that at Winterslow at least there was peace and quietness for her.

"Don't worry about it, Leonora, it is the same everywhere. These backbiters and slanderers manage to govern the world. We must humbly submit to them; they overpower us by numbers."

"But must poor little Kate suffer?" she said.

"It would be impossible for me to receive any overtures from Mr. Sebright, after the message I received from his mother."

"But the child will suffer."

"Oh! it's no doubt some passing fancy, and she'll forget it, if we keep her away from him. She's so young that it cannot be serious. She won't know her own mind for a few

years more." And he thought of his own marriage to a girl who did not know her own mind.

"But, William, remember I was no older when I loved Frank; and look what has come of that."

Mr. Temple looked very serious.

"I do not see how I am to condescend to listen to anything from a member of that family," said Temple.

"But, William, I entreat you, do not let pride stand in the way of love. The boy is not to blame."

"Well, we'll see about it," he said.

CHAPTER L.

THE COUSINS.

My play is cat and mouse.—*Mephistopheles.*

When Lord Arun left The Birches, he went with the Earl's party on a visit to a country house about twenty miles distant, where they were to stay a week. Harry Rivers remained with Frank Forncett. Lord Medway found his friend very serious during this week. Even chaff about "the widow" did not cheer him.

"Look here, old boy," said Lord Medway, "this won't do. You ain't a bit of fun now. I believe you really are seriously in love, and with that pretty little Temple girl. A man in love is such a confounded bore. Hang it, Val, I can't stand it, you know."

"No, Charlie, I'm not in love; but you won't be bothered with me much longer, for I've some serious business to attend to in town when we leave here."

"By Jove! that *is* good! Old Val with serious business to attend to! That's something quite new. What shall we hear next? Can I help you? Not that I understand business a bit; but I'm willing to do my best."

"No, thanks, Charlie. I don't want any help. Don't you see, it's something that concerns some one else, and I don't want her name mentioned, don't you know?"

"Oh, there's a woman at the bottom of this, is there? You sly old boy, calling that serious business!"

"It *is* very serious, I assure you, Charlie. I'll tell you some day."

So Lord Arun went up to town to see if he could find Arundel Lifton. He called at his chambers in the Albany, and found that he was away, but was expected in a few days, and would not probably remain more than one night.

The servant, who knew that there had been a misunderstanding between his master and Lord Arun, and that they did not speak, seemed reluctant to say exactly which day he expected his master; but, on hearing that Lord Arun wanted to see him on very important business, he thought it might be some family matter, and told him the day.

He went there on the evening of the day mentioned, and found Lifton just arrived.

"Well, my boy," said Arundel Lifton, "come to look me up again? Can't do without me? Got into a scrape? Or is it the widow again?"

"Arundel, I've come on serious business," said Valentine, looking serious, and trying to talk very seriously.

"Nonsense, Val; you've nothing to be serious about. You fancied you were in love some time ago, and you cut your best friend for trying to prevent you from making a fool of yourself. I suppose you've found it out now, and are grateful?"

Valentine could not help feeling that his cousin had perhaps, on that occasion, acted for his benefit; but he could not forgive him for his villainy. Indignation made him feel that he could speak out his mind to Lifton, but the cool, plausible manner of the man upset him. He began to talk in his usual roundabout way.

"Well, you see, a fellow may be grateful; but then, don't you know, it depends on what the other fellow does it for?—I mean, you know, what's his object."

"There, Val, now you're more like yourself. I begin to see what you mean. You want to know my object in preventing you from marrying that little woman."

"No, that isn't what I mean."

"Well, whatever you mean, let's have some dinner, Val, for I'm deucedly hungry."

"Thanks; I don't wish to dine. I have something to say;" and he looked very serious again, and spoke slowly.

"Oh! hang it, Val. I can't listen to anything till I've had something to eat. What you have to say may be serious to you, but the most serious thing in life to me just now is my dinner; so come along, and don't be a fool. I'll listen to what you say after dinner. One cannot judge a question impartially on an empty stomach."

Val followed his cousin, but he felt that he was being too easily managed by him, and that he was not showing his indignation sufficiently.

A dainty dinner was daintily served, and the astute Lifton, thinking from Valentine's manner that there really was something rather unpleasant in store for him, made the boy eat and drink well, and kept him amused by pleasant chat, and no one better knew the art of being agreeable than Arundel Lifton.

By the time the dessert was on the table, Valentine was in a very different mood. He could not help thinking how jolly his cousin was, and wondered whether he was really so bad as he thought him. He was almost inclined to think that perhaps the women were in fault, and that Lifton, with a good wife, might have been a good man.

"But that splendid woman," he thought to himself—"surely she must have been a good wife," and he looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"Well, Val, what's the serious business? I think the last thing we arrived at was that you were very glad I got you out of the clutches of the pseudo-widow, wasn't it? What next?"

"No, Arundel, look here, you know—who made her first get into trouble?"

"By Jove! how should I know? You'd better ask her. I'm not her keeper."

"I have no occasion to ask—I know well enough."

"Then what do you ask me for?"

"Well, Arundel, you've got some what's-his-name—I mean, you know, conscience—and you must know, you know, that it wasn't right."

"What isn't right—my conscience?"

"No. I mean, don't you see, the way you behaved to that poor girl?"

"Good heavens! Val, one would want a dozen consciences, if one is to be troubled about every little minx one meets."

"But you ought to look after her."

"Look after her! Why, whatever could I do for her, except what I have done to keep her out of your way?"

"Something ought to be done for her, don't you see?"

"No, I don't see. She has a regular allowance from her husband, and if she wants money, she knows I wouldn't refuse. What more can she want?"

"Her life is wrecked."

"Romantic nonsense! She has a very pleasant time of it.

She has liberty to do what she likes, and go where she likes, and she is always taking in young fools like you."

"But, you know, she is not living like that now; she is shut up, don't you see? and has repented."

"Repented! Fiddlesticks! Those creatures never do repent. What a fool you are, Val!"

Val looked into the fire, and began to turn over in his mind slowly whether his cousin was right, and that he was a fool; but he could not help believing poor Flora.

"But I'm sure of it," he said, "because I've got her letter," feeling for it in his pocket, for he always carried it about with him. He took it out and looked at it.

"Show it to me," said Lifton.

Val was just going to pass it over, when his eye caught the sentence where she implored him not to tell Arundel Lifton what she had said.

"No," he said, "I can't show it, it's private don't you see?"

"Oh, private is it?" replied Lifton, "the little animal has been saying something about me, I suppose. Telling you a romantic and pitiful story, I suppose, of which she is the heroine, and I the villain."

"No," said Val, trying to shield her, "I heard all that when I went down with Charlie to his uncle's place."

"Oh, that's where you heard it, is it? And where was that?"

"At Copse Hill."

"Copse Hill?"

"Yes."

"Did you stay there long?"

"About four days."

"Did you meet anyone there?"

"Yes."

"Whom?"

"Her daughter."

"Oh, that accounts for this sentimental mood, does it, Val? I suppose you heard all the history?"

"I did, Arundel."

"And I hope you see what a deuced lucky thing it was that I saved you from marrying the woman. You see she's got a daughter nearly your own age. With a clever arrangement of paint and hair-dye she manages to make you young fellows believe she's only a girl. Ugh! it's horrid to think of kissing all that chemical stuff. How can you do it, Val?"

Val felt a little ashamed for a moment at having so thoroughly believed in Flora's youth, but then she had acknowledged to him that her object in life had been to attract, so he still believed in her repentance.

"But, Arundel, don't you see she's sorry for it now, and you being the first, you know, to ruin her, ought to take care of her."

"Hang it, boy, there's nothing I can do. I can't have that little painted animal tied to my tail. What can I do?"

"Do you know where she is?"

"No, but it's easily found out, through the bankers; Temple's bankers supply her with money, and she is obliged to communicate with them."

"Let us find out and see what we can do, don't you see?"

"I'll find out, but I'm not going after her, and if you go, she'll be getting hold of you again and making a fool of you."

"But look here, you see, you ought to join me, because it's only right."

"Nonsense, boy! I'll join you for your own sake."

Arundel Lifton felt irritated. He hoped this matter was long since hushed up, and that it would never be mentioned again. It was only spoken of in whispers amongst the elders of his family, and here was this young cousin with the whole story at his fingers' ends.

"Val," he said presently, "I suppose you met Temple at Copse Hill."

"Yes."

"Did he know you were related to me."

"I don't know at all."

"When did you hear all this, then?"

"Oh, Charlie told me, don't you see, when we went up for the night?"

"Then my name was not mentioned?"

"No—at least, I heard somebody talking about you."

"Who was it?"

"Oh, either Lord Ravensbourne or his brother."

"What did they say?"

"They called you a scoundrel."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to Lord Ravensbourne, or his brother, whichever it was."

"Did you see any other member of the Temple family?"

"Yes, Arundel, I did."

"Who was it?"

"Your wife."

For once Arundel Lifton's face showed some feeling. He had been dreading to ask Valentine this question, and yet he was anxious to do so. Knowing how little she went out, he thought it just possible that she might not have shown herself.

He sat looking at the fire for a long time without speaking.

"Arundel, how could you leave such a glorious woman?" said Val presently.

"None of your romantic nonsense," said Lifton.

Valentine would have thought this a hard-hearted remark, and would probably have pursued the subject; but the tone in which it was said effectually stopped him. It was a very unusual tone for his cousin.

There was silence for some time.

"Well, Val," said Lifton, "I suppose you don't want to go off on this wild goose chase in a hurry. It will do in a week or two, I suppose?"

"I should like to do it as soon as possible, don't you see? because I'm uneasy about it."

"What a boy you are, Val! By the time you're as old as I am you'll take life more easily. Well, I'll communicate with the bankers, and drop you a line to let you know, and we'll see what can be done. But I think you'll find she'd rather be left to go her own way."

After Valentine had left, Arundel Lifton sat there thinking till far into the night.

He had taken the world easily, never allowing anything to interfere between him and his pleasure. He gave one the idea of having no cares or sorrows. He was lucky in everything he undertook. He had no intimate friend, for he trusted no one sufficiently. He never made a friend of a servant, or treated a servant with much confidence. He seemed to stand alone in the world, and to be quite satisfied with himself.

And yet there were times when he was intensely miserable, and he seemed to have no power of driving his misery away. It would take complete possession of him. On these occasions he would sit for hours, doing nothing.

Whether he was troubled with that conscience of which Val made mention, or whether it was some physical defect, it is impossible to say. A physician might have put it down to the liver, whereas another person might say it was his conscience. But he never confided to anyone what his feelings were at these times.

On this night he seemed worse than usual. The fire slowly died out, the cinders making an unpleasant creaky noise as they fell. All was so still that the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to fill the room with sound.

The last red spark in the fire was gone, but he still sat there motionless.

At last he became conscious of the cold. He got up, and went to the sideboard and poured out some brandy, and took it, and then walked restlessly up and down the room.

"Why need that young puppy remark that she was a glorious creature?" he said to himself. "What business is it of his? Glorious creature, indeed! As if he were a judge! Why, she's absolutely perfect. She's divine. And I?" he stopped in front of the mirror and looked at himself, "why, I'm a fiend, and I look it. But what might I have been if I had listened to her? Well, I deserve it."

He then finished the brandy he had poured out and went to bed.

CHAPTER LI.

FLORA REPENTANT.

Change slander to remorse—that is some good.
Much Ado about Nothing.

There came a big spider
And sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.
Nursery Rhyme.

FLORA'S repentance was not, as Arundel Lifton supposed, temporary or imaginary. When she left Rowell St. Dunstan she went to London, thinking she could remain unnoticed there till she could decide what was to be done.

Whenever she was in town she was accustomed to go to a well-known church, celebrated for its ritualistic service and its fashionable audience—or rather congregation. She liked the music and flowers and incense and fashionable dresses and she used to say her prayers from a dainty little prayer-book bound in ebony and silver, and try to persuade herself she was very much in earnest.

There was altogether a pleasurable sensation to her in this little bit of playing at religion. She would walk up the aisle in a graceful way, with many yards of rich silk and Estelle behind her. Then she would rustle prettily into her place, and take some time to arrange her silks round her.

There was nothing stern in religion to her. She would say the prayers through mechanically, being accustomed to the words and not attaching any meaning to them. And if the preacher hinted in his sermon of anything unpleasant hereafter for those who do not the right thing in this world, it was quite lost upon her, for she was considering how she appeared, and who was looking at her.

So she made her religion one of the pretty little amusements of her life.

On the first Sunday after she left Rowell St. Dunstan she went to her favourite church. She was really sincere in her repentance, but was weak-minded, and she began to wish she had some one to whom she could tell all her troubles and the history of her life. She was unusually weak at this time, for the quiet life at Rowell St. Dunstan had not agreed with her. She had no resources in herself, and she missed the constant change and excitement. She certainly deserved praise, for she found the process of repentance very hard work indeed, and she often felt tempted to resume her old life. She had lost health and spirits, and on the morning she walked into church it was not with the air she had been accustomed to. It was at a time when people were out of town, so the congregation was not a fashionable one. This in former days would have depressed Flora, and considerably interfered with her devotions; but now it was in accordance with her feelings, for the world had become a very dull place to her.

Poor Flora had not been able to sacrifice herself so far as to give up all artificial adornment; she had tried it, but the result seemed to her too dreadful, and Estelle's remarks on the subject were not encouraging.

So, although she looked very subdued on that Sunday morning, and showed signs of being out of health, she still had the pink and white face and yellow hair. Loss of health and spirits had entirely taken away the brightness of the eyes, and no amount of pencilling would make it up. There was also a deep mark under the eyes which paint would not fill.

She kept her eyes down, and said her prayers more gravely than usual, and tried to imagine that she felt all she was saying; but she could not feel it. She had not brain enough.

She wanted some one to take her in hand, and point out to her how wicked she had been, and what she ought to do. She tried to listen to the sermon, but it did not keep her attention. As she walked out of church she went down the side aisle—always avoiding notice now, instead of courting it—and as she stood waiting for the crush in front, she saw a little placard by the side of a red-baize door. On this placard people were invited to confession, or rather they were informed that confession would be heard after church.

In a moment the thought struck her that she longed to confess.

"Estelle," she said, in a hurried whisper, "go home. I will come soon."

She nervously pulled open the baize door and disappeared.

She found herself in a small bare room, furnished simply with a table and a few chairs. Presently another person came in and sat down; a woman poorly dressed, looking very ill and thin.

They looked shyly at one another, but did not speak. They waited for some minutes, when, to Flora's great relief, the clergyman who had taken chief part in the service appeared. He beckoned to the pale thin woman to follow him, and Flora found herself alone.

She sat there for what seemed to her a very long time, for she was getting nervous, and did not like the ugly room, but in reality she had only waited a few minutes, when the same clergyman appeared again. He seated her on one side of the table, and himself took a seat on the other side. He was a man of perhaps thirty, or a little over, but he had enough knowledge of the world and of womankind (in the confessional) to see what sort of woman he had before him. He noticed the painted face, and dyed hair, and splendid clothes, and pretty little manner of Flora. He found no difficulty in dealing with her at first. He had had previous experience of such a pretty sinner.

He gradually and gently drew Flora's story from her. She did not mention any names, and he did not ask for them. When he had heard all he began to question her, to find out whether her repentance was really sincere; but poor Flora broke down under the questioning, and began to cry.

"Do not distress yourself," he said. "I am only anxious to guide and counsel you. Tell me what you would like to do."

"I want to get right away out of this cruel world," she

said; and she put her head down on the table, and sobbed loudly.

"Hush! hush!" said the clergyman, who was curate of the church. He began to feel uncomfortable with such an hysterical woman on his hands. Flora was utterly unable to control herself, and the parson looked round helplessly to see what he could do. He began to think it would be necessary to keep smelling-salts, or sal volatile, or some such remedies in the confessional.

The artificial arrangements on Flora's face were being rapidly washed away by her tears, and the curate was getting alarmed at being shut up in a room with a woman in such a state. He thought of calling in help, and then it occurred to him that it would seem very odd for him to be found with a woman in hysterics.

"I beseech you to be calm," he said; but Flora showed no sign of listening to his entreaty, and sobbed louder than ever.

At last the hysterical fit abated, and the curate, frightened of a recurrence, endeavoured to bring the interview to a speedy close.

"The rector is away," he said, "and I feel that your case ought to be laid before him. He will come back on Thursday, and I will see him at once, and if you will come here on Friday morning at twelve, he will see you. He will, I am sure, agree with me that the only way in which you can atone for your past life is by joining our sisterhood. You will then be out of the way of further temptation, and will get out of the world of which you have grown tired. Don't you think it will be best for you?"

"Is it a nunnery?" said Flora, in a crying tone.

"No, it is not a nunnery, but a home where you can devote yourself to the service of Christ, and find peace from the troubles of the world. But Mr. Johnson will tell you more about it. Will you come on Friday to this room?"

"Yes," said Flora, beginning to cry again.

The curate, not wanting to witness another hysterical fit, hurried her out to the church door, and speedily found a cab for her.

Estelle wondered what had become of her mistress. After watching anxiously for her for some time, she put on her bonnet, intending to walk to the church and inquire about her; but just as she was leaving the house, Flora drove up in the cab.

Estelle did not at all like the dull life she had been leading

lately, but she really was attached to her mistress, and felt it her duty to stay with her, whatever freaks she might practise. She was glad to be in town again, though it was the dull season, and she hoped it meant the beginning of a gayer life.

She had noticed how her mistress was losing health, and had often remonstrated with her for not moving about more, but she had found out some time ago that all remonstrance was vain. But when she saw Flora's appearance, as she got out of the cab, she broke out into loud lamentations.

"Ah! madame, then where have you been? What is the matter? Is it that *diable* man?"

Estelle always connected everything unpleasant with Arundel Lifton. She took her mistress to the sofa, and went running on—

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* it must be. The *bête*—the wretch! he loves madame, he will not let anyone else love her. Madame, lie still—I will fetch something."

Estelle succeeded in reviving her mistress, and then took her upstairs to repair the damages which tears had made in her face.

Flora felt that her next task was to tell Estelle of their separation. She was in such an excitable mood that she wanted to tell everything at once. As Estelle made up her face and arranged her hair, she said,

"Why trouble about it, Estelle? I do not need it any more. I am going away from you, Estelle, and I shall be shut up in a nunnery, and wear ugly coarse black clothes, and never see anybody, and say prayers all day."

Flora's ideas on the subject had only been gathered from books.

"Ah! madame, then you must not go and shut yourself up it will kill you; you will die. And poor Estelle—what can she do without you?"

"I daresay you will find some one better than me, Estelle."

"Ah, never, madame—never!"

"You must go for a holdiday with your friends, Estelle. I will give you some money, and you shall have all my clothes. I shall never want them again."

Estelle's face rather brightened at the idea of having all her mistress's beautiful clothes to show in her native village, but she was really sorry at the idea of losing her.

"Madame is generous—too generous; but I want no holiday; I want to be with madame always."

"'Tis impossible," said Flora. "I must get away out of

this cruel world. There is no happiness for me here!" and she began to cry.

Estelle tried to comfort her, but she was in an hysterical state. The continual repression she had practised for the last few months had made her weaker than ever, and now that she had unburdened her mind she broke down entirely.

For three days she did not leave her room, and Estelle nursed her carefully. But she had not altogether lost that elasticity of body and mind which had enabled her for so many years to keep her youthful appearance, and on Friday morning she was ready to keep her appointment with the curate to meet the rector.

It was a fine, bright September morning, and when she started out she felt so much better than she had done for a long time, and so full of spirits, that she half repented her resolution. She tripped along in dainty fashion, almost in her old way. She had to cross Regent Street, and, finding she was early, thought she would prolong her walk by just going to look at the shops. Although she was dressed more quietly than usual, she looked different from the people who usually frequent Regent Street in the early morning in September; therefore she attracted attention. She soon found she was being closely followed by a man; then the horror of her past life came back on her, and she hurried to the church.

There was no one in it, and as she walked up the aisle her little steps sounded through the place. She rushed quickly to the red baize door, glad to get out of the oppressive stillness of the church. She found no one in the little room, and she sat down nervously, and began to look round her. She was such a creature of impulse that she was depressed as easily as she was excited; and the dulness and loneliness of the church, and the bare look of the little room, had quite made her forget the exhilaration she had felt from the bright September sunshine half an hour ago.

She sat there what seemed to her an hour, but what was really only a few minutes. She began to wish she might run out again, but was almost frightened to do so. If she could only have got out of that room straight into the open air, she might have done it. But she dreaded walking right through that lonely church again, hearing her own footsteps.

She saw a curtain on one side of the room behind which, it seemed to her, there must be an exit somewhere, but she had become so thoroughly nervous that she was afraid to lift it

aside. What should she do? She could not bear this much longer, she thought. How she wished she had brought Estelle with her. The room was not well lighted. The window was a narrow slit, with diamond panes, and was very dusty. Just then the sun went under a cloud, which gave even a more ghostly look to the place. She got up impatiently, ready to cry, when she saw a very big spider walking across the floor to her. She had a great horror of spiders, and most creeping animals, and the room was so small that she did not see well how to get out of its way. She took up her skirts, and tried to dodge the spider, but the poor fellow, fancying she was making darts at him, got embarrassed, and ran in all directions. It suddenly occurred to her to jump on the chair, which she did; and while in this undignified position, with the look of the greatest alarm on her face, she saw the curtain pushed aside, and the curate enter. He appeared somewhat astonished to see her in this position, and inquired what was the matter.

"I have been very much alarmed," said Flora. "Look at that monster," pointing to the unfortunate spider.

"Pray don't alarm yourself," said the curate, sweeping the spider into a corner with his handkerchief, and helping Flora down from the chair. "Pray sit down and calm yourself. Mr. Johnson will be here presently."

Flora sat down uneasily, looking round nervously to see where the spider had gone.

Now if she had walked straight from the September sunlight into some pleasant room to meet Mr. Johnson, it is doubtful whether she would not have been reluctant to give up her liberty, and money, and everything else, to join the sisterhood of this church; but the big empty church, and little bare room, and large ugly spider, had so worked upon her imagination that she was ready to do anything and everything she was told.

The curate left her for a few moments, and then returned, asking her to follow him. She passed behind the curtain, and through a dark passage, till she came to a larger and somewhat better-looking room, which was the vestry. There she found a comfortable-looking middle-aged man. The curate had evidently prepared him to receive a very nervous lady, for he was excessively kind and tender in his manner. He did not trouble her to tell her story, but repeated it to her as he had heard it from the curate, and asked her if it was all true. She said it was.

"And now," he said, "you propose to atone for the grievous sins you have committed by devoting yourself and all you have to the service of God."

At the mention of her grievous sins she looked a little nervous, and showed signs of crying. The rector, having heard of the scene on Sunday, did not want a repetition of it, so thought proper to make no more allusions to her sins. He questioned her very closely as to whether she really wished to renounce the world altogether. She, being in the most abject state, was glad to say yes to anything. The rector comforted her as well as he could, and promised to make arrangements for her removal to the branch sisterhood in Surrey in a week's time.

The curate put her in a cab and sent her to her lodgings, promising to call on her frequently before her departure.

She occupied the week in making her arrangements. Her dresses and many of her clothes were given to Estelle. Her jewelry she would take with her; for, as the curate pointed out, if she wished to leave the sisterhood before she finished her novitiate she would be glad of her jewels, and if she did not they would be the means, through their value, of doing a great deal of good.

On the day appointed, one of the sisters came to take Flora down to the home in Surrey.

Mr. Johnson had commissioned a particularly kind-hearted woman to do this, as he knew how excitable Flora was. But on this occasion she was in an apathetic mood, and nothing would rouse her. When they arrived at the gates, they turned in through some small but pretty grounds. The long shadows of September lay across the grass, the gossamer floated in the air, and a robin was loudly singing his evening hymn, perched in a tree over the gate.

"Is it not lovely?" said Sister Agnes, who had been all the summer working hard in London, going into squalid houses, and nursing sick people. But Flora, who liked the gaslight glare of a ball-room better than the September sunlight, and the music of a waltz better than a robin's song, did not wake up from her apathy to reply.

She was very kindly received by the mother and sisters. Sister Agnes related to the mother what she had heard from Mr. Johnson. The mother thought it would be well to keep Flora's mind engaged, and tried to find employment for her; but she divided her time between hysterics and apathy, and at last it was deemed prudent to have medical advice for her.

Every care was taken of her. Her income was a welcome addition to the funds of the home, and the sisters were, for the most part, kind women, and pitied her, though perhaps some of them were inclined to consider that what she suffered was only a just retribution for her many sins, for her story soon got whispered amongst them.

The calm subdued manner of the sisters irritated rather than soothed her. She longed for some quick excitable person like herself, and often called out for Estelle. The mother, fancying that it was better for her to be kept quiet, appointed the quietest of the sisters to attend on her.

There is a great diversity of character generally to be seen in a sisterhood, especially a Protestant sisterhood. With Catholics the fancy for a secluded life often begins early, or a mother who has several daughters thinks one should be a nun, so the life is adopted professionally, as it were, and not with respect to any particular disposition. But amongst Protestants in England the sisters are generally women who cannot get on at home, or have been disappointed in love, or have seen all the pleasures of life and got tired of them.

Women who cannot get on in their own families, who are always discontented and out of temper, and make everyone around them uncomfortable, often do well in a sisterhood. The energy which is spent on bad temper is turned into a useful channel.

The sister who waited on Flora had, years ago, irritated her parents, and brothers and sisters, and the servants of the household by her continual bad temper and disagreeable ways, and now she equally irritated Flora by her calm serenity and gentle manner.

Whether the treatment of Flora in the home was right or not, she showed no signs of amendment; so, by the time the chivalrous Lord Arun had made a resolution to better her condition, it seemed probable that she was past bettering in this world, at least.

CHAPTER LII.

MORE GOSSIP.

XANTHIAS: Yes, but the fun of gossiping!
ÆACUS: By Jove, I don't know anything more exquisite.
XANTHIAS: By Jove, the god of families. And, when you hear through keyholes, eh! the master's secrets?
ÆACUS: Glorious!
Of course you go and tell your friends?
XANTHIAS: Of course I do.
By Jove, 'tis then I know the height of happiness.
ÆACUS: Phœbus Apollo! give me your right hand, my pal:
Let us embrace, for we are cronies suitable.

ARISTOPHANES.—*The Frogs.*

IT is a bright, frosty morning at Copse Hill. Everybody is moving quickly, to keep warm. The school-children are running home to dinner, blowing their fingers as they go. Even old Biggins is carrying his four and twenty stone of flesh about more briskly than usual. He is helping the men to unpack one of his waggons which has come in from London, and he is anxious to get off to the market at a neighbouring town, so he is hurrying the man with his usual monotonous, strong language. Miss Tattleton is busy, for it is Saturday morning. There is extra baking to do, and various goods for Saturday night customers have to arrive by carrier, and be unpacked. Moreover, Miss Tattleton has to be in the bakehouse herself this morning, for John made such a number of visits to the Pleiades on the previous day that he is unable to attend to his work properly. He has again had notice to leave, but he has that, on an average, once a fortnight, so he takes no notice of it. Miss Tattleton, after exhausting all the epithets she usually applies to him on these occasions, has set him to clean the yard, and he is only waiting for an opportunity, when he thinks she will not be watching, to go over to the Pleiades and get a glass of beer. He thinks, if he could just get one glass to pull him together, he could do his work. He sees Mrs. Voyd go by and enter Miss Tattleton's gate, and then he thinks he will soon be safe, for Miss Tattleton is sure to have a gossip with her, although it is Saturday.

Miss Tattleton has just finished in the bakehouse, and takes off her baking-apron and shakes the flour from her dress, and goes in to see Mrs. Voyd, and commences at once a lament over John's bad ways.

"Why not make him take the pledge?" said Mrs. Voyd, "we can do no real good with the lower classes till we make them all teetotalers."

"Oh! he's taken it several times," replied Miss Tattleton, "but it's no good. And, poor soul, he can't do without a little beer. He's not a large eater, and when he's all right he really is a good worker."

Miss Tattleton, with all her faults, had a very large vein of kindness running through her. That tenderness, or pity for others, or soft-heartedness, or whatever it is, belongs so especially to the human race that we speak of it as *humanity*. We sometimes say of a person that he is so human, or that he has so much human kindness in him, or that he is full of humanity. All this points to the fact that this particular quality is an attribute of the human race. A spot can generally be found in the hardest heart where humanity dwells, and how often do we overlook the faults of a person because of his humanity.

Miss Tattletoo had many faults; she could be a good friend and a bad enemy. There is nothing shows true nobility of character more than to behave gracefully to your enemy. But Miss Tattleton could not behave gracefully to an enemy —not by any means. However, she had humanity, and this humanity was a thing that Mrs. Voyd did not understand. The Rev. Vypar Voyd and his wife are well matched in that, they go through life doing their duty stolidly, doggedly, and mechanically, but they have no humanity. They do not understand what it is.

Therefore Mrs. Voyd did not understand Miss Tattleton's pity for her drunken servant. Mrs. Voyd's excuse for coming round to Miss Tattleton's was that she wanted some trifle in a hurry, as she was going away on a visit to her mother at Battlefield till Monday. This was a convenient opportunity of getting the latest news to take to her seven sisters. When she had made her purchase she followed Miss Tattleton into her snug little back parlour, and was placed in the big easy-chair ready for a gossip.

"The Temples are still away," said Miss Tattleton.

"And I don't think they'll come back in a hurry," said Mrs. Voyd. "I think Mr. Voyd has settled them."

"And no loss either," said Miss Tattleton. "They never bought anything in the village."

"I consider it is a fortunate thing they have gone, and I only hope they may never come back," exclaimed Mrs. Voyd, in a tone of virtuous indignation. "With such an example,"

she continued, "as they set we can never hope to do anything with the lower classes. If we could only get rid of the Frowdes and Mr. Forncett, and get some good earnest people who would help in parish work, we might make a reform in the parish. But at present we have so many hindrances."

"Yes," said Miss Tattleton. "Mr. Forncett isn't much good, thought he is the son of a lord, they say. When the Wemys's had the place they bought seven pounds of butter from me every week, and never grumbled at the price; and a lot of other things besides; and the servants used to run in here whenever they liked, and bought all they wanted here."

This may have had something to do with the fact that Mrs. Wemys never could keep her servants for any length of time.

As to the Frowdes, Miss Tattleton did not secretly in her heart wish them to go. It was Manly Frowde who had petitioned the Government for a post-office in the village, and suggested her as the post-mistress; and his large postal business kept the office up. 'Tis true she derived very little actual profit as post-mistress, but the position gave her importance, and brought many more people to her shop. Those who were fond of gossip could now find an excuse in a shilling's-worth of stamps. For every impression of Her Majesty's head that went out of that shop a proportionate amount of gossip also went. Then there were many people who came to the shop simply to hear the last news of the "author over the way," and Miss Tattleton liked the importance of being the person who supplied that news. But Miss Tattleton knew Mrs. Voyd's opinion concerning the Frowdes, so she quite agreed with her that the sooner they could be got rid of the better.

"There they go," said Miss Tattleton.

Manly Frowde and his wife were at this moment passing the window. Mrs. Voyd looked out, keeping herself back sufficiently not to be seen.

"There she is, looking up in his face," said Miss Tattleton. "I believe she worships that man, and would tell a lie, or do anything for him. How ridiculous they are, always going about together like that!"

"Mr. Voyd says *she* is the worst of the two. She doesn't hesitate to interfere in parish affairs. And what a bad man *he* must be to be carrying on with Miss Temple in that way! And that Mr. Forncett, too! I am sure Mr. Voyd has done real good in getting his poor friend Mr. Sebright out of her clutches. Mrs. Sebright is most grateful."

"Why don't you introduce Mr. Sebright to your sisters?" said Miss Tattleton, looking mischievous. "He would never look at that ugly Temple girl if he once saw them."

If Miss Tattleton had been mentioning Mrs. Voyd's sisters to anyone else, she would have said, "those awkward Urgent gals;" but of course she suited herself to her company.

"Mr. Voyd will no doubt invite him in time, when he comes to his senses, and has given up the acquaintance of such people as the Frowdes," said Mrs. Voyd. "I see Mr. Forncett has a visitor," she continued, peeping through the window which overlooked the garden of The Birches.

"Yes," replied Miss Tattleton; "he came in here yesterday."

"Did he?" said Mrs. Voyd, in an inquiring tone, evidently wishing to hear about it.

"He came to order some things to be sent up to old Leonard Day, who is ill."

"Yes, somebody came to tell Mr. Voyd Leonard was ill; but as Mr. Voyd says it will not do to help anyone who does not come to church. I hear that old Leonard has not been to church for years, so he cannot expect help. And what did the gentleman say?"

"Oh, I chaffed him about being married; for he came here when Mr. Forncett first looked at the place, and said he should so much like to live here himself. I asked him whether he still wanted to come, and whether he'd found a wife. He said if he wanted a wife he should like the little lady over the way, meaning that Temple girl. All the gentlemen seem in love with the little chit."

"The little hussy!" said Mrs. Voyd indignantly.

"I told him he was just too late, for she'd gone away, and nobody knew whether she was coming back, and that, according to all accounts, it was a good miss for him. 'What do you mean?' says he. 'Why,' says I, 'there's half-a-dozen others tacked on to her tail, and her father's had to get her away in a hurry, for fear of the consequences,' and I gave him a knowing wink."

"What did he say?" said Mrs. Voyd eagerly—she was becoming interested.

"Why, he looked puzzled, and said he was going see to her in London, and then he said 'good morning' rather sharply, and went out. And I thought, 'That's one for you, young man.'"

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Voyd. "You'd think a girl of

her age never would dare to go on so. How grateful Mr. Sebright ought to be to Mr. Voyd!"

While these two women are settling everybody's affairs for them, John has meandered down his usual path through the furze on the hill to the Pleiades.

"Well, John," said Biggins, "how's 'Lizer to-day?"

Until the vicar made such a bond of union between the innkeeper and the shopwoman, Biggins had been accustomed to mention Eliza Tattleton by a term which, if applied to a female dog, is perfectly correct, but, when applied to a woman, is considered particularly opprobrious, and is not to be placed on paper.

John answered with a grunt. He had not had his glass of beer yet, and did not feel inclined to speak to anyone.

"Come along, old man," said Biggins. "I see what's the matter with you," and he handed him some beer.

John drank it off eagerly, and then sat down.

"Let's have another, guv'nor," he said. "I'm beginning to feel a bit better now. *She's* such a fool," he continued, pointing his finger in the direction of Miss Tattleton's (he always designated his mistress by a pronoun). "She's been at it with her jaw this morning, and turned me out of the bakehouse, all because I felt a bit dizzy, and couldn't eat no breakfast; and if I'd had a glass of this 'ere, I should have been all right."

"I suppose you had the sack again," said old Biggins, with a laugh.

"Had the sack!—yes, and what's the good? She ain't a-going to get rid of me, when I was there afore her; she needn't think she is. She's got one of them gossiping there that's sure to be a long time, so I'll enjoy this glass, guv'nor."

John, who had an hour before been abjectly cowering before his mistress, was now taking courage.

"She ain't a bad sort, you know," John went on, "when you knows how to manage her. But lor' bless you! the women all wants managing—don't they now, guv'nor?"

"That's about it, old man," said Biggins oracularly, who had made rather a mess of it with womenkind himself. "Keep 'em in order, says I, that's the thing."

"Yes," said John, "and what right have she to the key of the beer?" John was thinking of his grievances. Miss Tattleton had a habit of keeping the key most strictly when John had one of his drinking fits on; but rumour, which is

ever unkind, hinted that Miss Tattleton wanted the key for her own use.

"Ah!" said Biggins, with a wink at John, "perhaps she wants it for herself."

Now John, although he liked to pour out his troubles concerning his mistress, did not like to hear her attacked. He had a certain admiration for her, and, however much he might blame her himself, he would not allow anyone else to do so; moreover, John was a chivalrous man, and would be inclined to take any woman's part. He had reached a very comfortable stage over his two glasses of beer—or rather mugs—for the beer at the Pleiades was served in large white mugs with blue and brown stripes painted round the rims and base; but he was quite alive to the fact that his mistress was being attacked.

"Lor' bless you—no, she don't want it; only don't you see, when she takes it, I ain't a-going to ask for it. I waits till she forgets all about it, and puts it in the old tea-pot on the sideboard, or in the jar on the mantelpiece. I knows all the places where she puts it, and if it ain't in one, I know it's in another."

"She's got it now, John," said Biggins.

"Ah! but don't you see, the barrel's empty, and we're expecting a new one by the carrier."

A customer came in, and seeing John, and knowing him to be what was called Miss Tattleton's factotum, asked him what was the latest news.

Now John, although he lived with the greatest gossip in the parish, did not understand the art and science of gossip. What he might have been with education and without drink it is impossible to say, but in his present state he showed a simplicity which some people might admire, and others ridicule. This was a specimen of his idea of latest news; he always spoke of what was last on his mind.

"Well, things are pretty middling. You see, I was waiting for a frost to get up a stick or two of celery, and I got it up the day afore yesterday, but it was regular worked under by worms, and not a bit worth eating could you get out of it. The grubs and worms in that bit of a garden you wouldn't believe."

It did not occur to John that the grubs and worms were likely to increase while he was continually popping at the birds with a miserable old gun he had; not that he was ever known to shoot a bird, but he effectually frightened them off.

The customer, not finding John's information worth much, dropped the subject.

The carrier came up at this moment; John was interested in the barrel of beer. Moreover, he thought if his mistress had finished her gossip and wondered where he was, he could make the excuse that he had been looking out for the carrier. So he went out to see if the barrel had arrived safely. The carrier and his horse were both odd characters. They travelled on three days in the week between Medenhithe and Righting, a distance of thirteen miles, and stopped at every public house on the way, and there were a good many. They started in the morning at eight, and seldom reached home till after midnight. They would probably sometimes have not reached home the same night, but that the old horse knew every inch of the way, and did not, like his master, refresh himself at every public house.

"Late again," said Biggins.

"Not very," said the carrier. "I had a heavy load."

"You always have," said Biggins, with an oath. "What have you got for them?" continued Biggins, pointing over his shoulder to Manly Frowde's place.

"Meat hamper and two cases of wine," said the carrier gruffly.

This was the sort of conversation that usually went on between the carrier and Biggins: not that Biggins much cared to know what came for the Frowdes, but he had found out what sort of information to supply to the vicar.

The carrier went round to Miss Tattleton's gate, and old John made a great show of getting out the beer barrel, and other packages, fearing lest his mistress had finished her gossip and was watching him. But he need have been in no fear, as the buzz of gossip and the venom of slander were still filling the little back parlour.

The carrier was a dreamy man with an apathetic temperament, and unless you went out to the cart and positively demanded the parcels you expected he carried them about with him for an indefinite period.

Now old John was more interested in the barrel of beer than anything else, and having got out that and one other parcel he was satisfied, and the carrier went on. Miss Tattleton, when she was not engaged in gossip, generally came out to look after her parcels; but being this morning particularly engaged in this way she neglected her business. So the parcel she most wanted was carried on.

If this sort of thing happened often it would no doubt help to account for the fact that Miss Tattleton's business was not a lucrative one. Mrs. Voyd is still in Miss Tattleton's parlour when Marston Sebright drives by in his dog-cart, with Jack by his side.

"Oh!" there's poor Mr. Sebright," said Mrs. Voyd, "with another gentleman. Perhaps it is his father. I wonder whether they have been calling on Vypar."

Mrs. Voyd went out at the shop door, and by running across the green just met the dog-cart as it pulled up at Manly Frowde's gate.

Jack lifted his hat to her. She put up her hand to shake hands with him.

"Have you seen Vypar?" she said.

"No; he was not at home."

Jack introduced her to his father.

"Oh! I'm so sorry Vypar was not at home; but he is sure to be presently, for we are to start in half an hour for my father's, where we stay till Monday."

"I called to see Mr. Voyd on some very important business," said Marston Sebright, rather severely, "and as it may take some little time I will not detain him now, but call another day."

"I'm sure he could spare half an hour," said Mrs. Voyd, anxious to know what the business was.

"I could not think of detaining him," said Marston Sebright.

"We shall be back on Monday," said Mrs. Voyd.

"I will take my chance of finding him next week," he replied.

Mrs. Voyd bowed and went away. When she got home she found her husband ready for their departure.

"Oh! Vypar," she said, "what do you think? Poor Mr. Sebright and his father called on you this morning, and as you were out they went on to those dreadful Frowdes. Isn't it a pity?"

"A great pity," said the vicar slowly. "If I had been at home I might have prevented it. Did you see them?"

"Yes, I was in Miss Tattleton's shop getting something I wanted, and I saw them drive past, and went out to speak to them. They said they had called on important business."

"Dear me, it's a great pity I was not at home, and how vexing that they should have gone round to the Frowdes. Mrs. Sebright is so excessively anxious that the intimacy

should be stopped. I fear I may have lost a great opportunity."

"I told them we should be back on Monday," said Mrs. Voyd.

"What did they say?"

"That they would call next week."

"I very much fear the influence of those Frowdes. You see they are fascinating people, and there is no knowing what consequences—serious consequences—may result from an interview between them and old Mr. Sebright. I am sorry—exceedingly sorry—that I was not at home. I might have been the means of doing much good."

"Well, Vypar, it can't be helped. I've heard something more about the Temples."

"What is it?" said the Vicar quickly.

"Why, there's another gentleman mixed up with Miss Temple now; he's staying with Mr. Forncett, and he was in Miss Tattleton's shop yesterday talking about her."

"A most extraordinary infatuation," said Mr. Voyd. "I can see nothing in the girl myself. Who is the gentleman?"

"Miss Tattleton didn't know his name. He said he was going to see her in London, but I rather fancy, from Miss Tattleton's account, she settled him, for she told him a bit of her mind concerning the hussy."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it, for I hope she will not entrap any good man. You see that sort of thing runs in families, and her mother was bad."

And this worthy and pious couple, after further discussing the wickednesses of their neighbours, mounted the high cart which they drove and started for the Rev. Uriah Urgent's, at Battlefield.

As they turned the corner by Miss Tattleton's they came upon Biggins, who was just starting for a neighbouring town where he got his provisions. He had been in his time a good rider and driver, and had even been brought before the magistrates for furious driving, but he had now grown so heavy that he found it impossible to mount into a high cart, so he used to drive a low poney carriage.

This carriage, which held four, he generally filled with low fellows of his own sort, men who toadied to him, for he liked to be king amongst his associates—a brutal king of a set of brutes—and as they passed anyone of whom they did not approve they shouted out some coarse remark. The presence

of a lady did not deter Biggins from using obscene language or brutal oaths.

Now Biggins had just shouted out something very ugly to a group of people who were Manly Frowde's visitors, when the vicar came upon him rather suddenly.

Biggins and his rough followers immediately looked sanctimonious. The vicar pretended to hear nothing, for Biggins was a useful man, He gave his saintly smile to all four occupants of the carriage, though they were men who never entered a church, and a strong suspicion of poaching and thieving was attached to all of them.

When the vicar's cart had passed, Biggins put his tongue in the side of his mouth, and his three followers, who watched his every movement, gave a fiendish grin. As he passed Winterslow, he said,

"I suppose we shan't hear no more of them for a time. I guess *he's* got rid of them. Odd doings there, they say. I never thought no good of them myself. Don't believe in people with them furrineering servants."

Biggins's strictures on what he believed to be the sins of the Temples were curious, seeing his own domestic relations concerning wives and children were exceedingly complicated, and not at all in accordance with the laws of the country. But then what was that to anybody but himself? as Biggins would observe. At any rate, Mr. Voyd did not seem to think it necessary to interfere; perhaps because Biggins had a very uncomfortable way of treating anybody that *did* interfere with him. His appearance was not altogether pleasant, and that, coupled with the way in which he would bring down his fist on the table, as he swore some nasty-sounding oath, made him an object of fear, if not of reverence. Moreover, he had always half a dozen low creatures ready to do anything he required, whether it was breaking windows, or cutting down shrubs, or destroying flower-beds, or flinging stones on people who were quietly sitting or walking in a garden, or throwing dirt into the water-supply, or any other horrible thing. Therefore Biggins was rather feared in the neighbourhood. So the Vicar found that not only was he an unpleasant enemy, but that he could be useful if cultivated. Thus the shortcomings of Biggins and his brutal followers were overlooked.

Mr. Voyd's object in going to Battlefield was to "change Sundays" with the Rev. Uriah Urgent. The latter gentleman considered it was good for his parish to be relieved of

the monotony of one clergyman, so he occasionally changed with neighbouring brethren of the cloth. Besides giving his parishioners a change, this saved himself and his brother clergyman from having to produce a new sermon every Sunday. This arrangement was very convenient as giving the clergymen a little change, and a little less to do in sermon-writing, but it was hardly a compliment to the parishioners to suppose that they got tired of their spiritual teacher.

So on this Saturday afternoon the Rev. Vypar Voyd went, accompanied by his wife and two of his old sermons, to Battlefield, and the Rev. Uriah Urgent walked up to Copse Hill on Sunday morning, armed with an unctuous address, which had been preached in most of the neighbouring churches, and slightly altered, to suit some of the notorious Copse Hill sinners.

CHAPTER LIII.

MARSTON SEBRIGHT AT COPSE HILL.

The confirmed gossip is always either malicious or ignorant. The one variety needs a change of heart, and the other a change of pasture. Gossip is always a personal confession either of malice or imbecility, and the young should not only shun it, but, by the most thorough culture, relieve themselves from all temptations to indulge in it. It is a low, frivolous, and too often a dirty business. There are country neighbourhoods in which it rages like a pest. Churches are split in pieces by it. Neighbours are made enemies by it for life. In many persons it degenerates into a chronic disease which is practically incurable. Let the young cure it while they may.

When Mrs. Voyd left the Sebrights at Manly Frowde's gate, Jack ran across the lawn to find his friends.

"Oh! here comes Jack," said Mrs. Frowde, clapping her hands with delight, for she had been wondering why so many days passed without news of him, and she began to fear that he had found difficulties with respect to Kate.

Manly Frowde got up and opened a French window, and the three dogs all woke up from a comfortable sleep on the hearth-rug and rushed out barking to greet Jack.

"Is it all settled?" said Mrs. Frowde, before anyone had time to exchange greetings.

"No," said Jack, with a long face, "but my father's at the gate."

"Is he?" said Manly Frowde; "you stay here, I'll go and bring him in. I'll introduce myself."

"Whatever is the matter, Jack?" said Mrs. Frowde. "Won't your father agree to it?"

"We haven't got as far as that," said Jack. "The thing is that I can't possibly ask Mr. Temple."

"But why?"

"Oh! Mr. Voyd has managed to make very serious mischief."

"But surely Mr. Temple can see what manner of man Mr. Voyd is, and he'll not be influenced by anything he says."

"No; but Mr. Voyd conveyed a message from my mother to Mr. Temple, and Mr. Temple wrote such a reply that quite puts it out of my power to ask him if I may have Kate."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Frowde, in great distress, "can't something be done? We really must see what can be done. I'm so glad your father is here. Here he comes."

Manly Frowde, who had taken Marston Sebright's arm and was leading him round the path to the door, had a happy expression on his face, as much as to say, "Now I've got hold of a man after my own heart, and we'll have an intellectual feast."

Mrs. Frowde was introduced.

"It gives me very great pleasure to see you here," she said, showing the pleasure plainly in her face.

"And I am very glad to meet your husband," said Marston Sebright. "I've often wished to see him."

"How ungallant of you, father!" said Jack. "You should have returned Mrs. Frowde's compliment instead of paying it to her husband."

"To speak of one is to include both," said Frowde.

"Do let me offer you lunch," said Mrs. Frowde. "We have not long since finished breakfast, for we have some lazy visitors here, and the breakfast-table shall quickly be converted into the lunch-table."

"You have visitors?" said Jack.

"Yes, some favourites of yours, Jack," said Frowde. "Diana and Claudia Selfe. Harry Branscombe too arrived last night to help us to entertain the ladies."

"We're in the way, I fear," said Mr, Sebright.

"Oh, not at all," said Frowde. "The young people are looking about in the village."

Manly Frowde and Marston Sebright found so many subjects in common that Jack began to think they would forget all

about his affairs, which seemed to him the most important thing in the world.

They went on from one subject to another, playing as it were with each; thought after thought coming from them in easy, brilliant speech, their faces lighted up with intellectual fire.

Mrs. Frowde looked on, enchanted; and Jack no doubt would have appreciated it at any other time; but at present it seemed to him cruel that they could be discussing anything besides his troubles. He forgot that these troubles did not assume such magnitude in any other eyes than his own.

He made an impatient movement, and Mrs. Frowde, looking round at him, read his thoughts, and took pity on him.

At the next convenient period in the conversation she made a move to leave the table, and they all went into the book-room.

"I'm afraid, Frowde," said Marston Sebright, "you'll hardly have any patience with the love sorrows of a youngster. My boy here believes you have power to do anything, and as his course of true love seems to be running not smoothly, he wants you to help him in the difficulty."

"Of course I will," said Frowde.

Manly Frowde was a man who could talk seriously enough on any subject. He could discuss theology with a parson, or politics with a statesman, or tactics with a soldier. He was a man of wonderful information; not the sort of information that can be found in treasuries of knowledge, or dictionaries, or encyclopedias, or general reference books, for, as he said, he could get all that on his bookshelves, and there was no occasion to carry it about with him. But he was a well-read man, and in reading he knew what to remember and what to disregard. Therefore his mind was well stored, and he knew how to make good use of the storage.

But if Manly Frowde had never read a book at all, he would probably have been a remarkable man all the same. For he was an original thinker. He seemed to be a specially gifted man. It was impossible to live with him without feeling that he was divinely gifted.

And this clever man, who could gravely discuss any serious or deep question, was so young and fresh at heart that he could sympathise with young people, and when in their presence would seem like a big, happy boy.

Mr. Voyd was right when he described him as a "fascinating" man. There were many who would agree with Mr.

Voyd in that; not people only; for Manly Frowde had friends amongst the robins, and blackbirds, and thrushes, and tom-tits, and chaffinches, and other birds in his garden; and surely they were fascinated, to be on such friendly terms with him. The old Jackdaw, and the owls, and the pigeons, and the dogs would also have echoed Mr. Voyd's sentiment, for they all believed their master was a very great man. The old big dog not only thought his master the greatest of men, but thought himself the greatest of dogs because he belonged to such a master. Even the torpid old tortoise that used to crawl about the lawn showed an affection for his big, boyish master, and would put out his head to be stroked when he came near.

Yes, Mr. Voyd was right. Manly Frowde was a fascinating man. But he was something more. He did not use his powers of fascination for mere sport, or from a desire to please and to gain good opinion, but because he could not help himself. He was full of love and humanity, and that love and humanity seemed to perpetually surround him and attract living creatures to him.

To people who loved him he seemed almost divine, though he had fanlts like all other human beings; but to many he appeared to be only a poor scribbler, making a struggle for a living, or as William Black, the novelist, put it, "what might by courtesy be called a living."

To Jack Sebright he was a very great man.

He could laugh and talk and sympathise with Jack as if they were a couple of boys together, though he was nearly twice Jack's age; and yet Jack knew that behind all that there was wonderful power. In Jack's mind the power seemed even greater than it really was. Therefore he fancied that, if any one could remove his difficulties, Mr. Frowde was the man.

"And what's the difficulty, Jack," said Frowde, in a light buoyant way, as if difficulties were easily got over. "Is the little lady unwilling?"

"No," said the father, "he made sure of the lady before consulting the parents: we didn't do that in our days, did we, Frowde?" and Marston Sebright gave Manly Frowde a sly look.

"Lovers were alike in all ages, I fear," said Frowde, laughing.

"No, our difficulty is," said Marston Sebright, "that there's been some little mischief made. Your Vicar here, who seems

to be an admirable young man so far as his priestly duty is concerned, has been somewhat officious concerning Jack's affairs. Mrs. Sebright thinks that the young man is much attached to Jack, and was anxious to prevent him from making an unsuitable marriage. I only know Temple as a public man, but I should hardly imagine that such a man would bring up his daughter to be so loose a character as your Vicar describes her to be."

"Our little Kate a loose character. Good heavens! Mr. Sebright, what do they mean?" said Mrs. Frowde. She spoke so excitedly that the dogs thought there was something the matter, and started up to bark at the enemy.

"Yes, doggies, you may well bark when you hear such a wicked thing about our Kate."

Big dog looked appealingly to his mistress, as if to say, "Tell me where to find the scoundrel who said it, and I'll make short work of him."

Mrs. Frowde had been so startled at this accusation against Kate, who seemed to her like a beautiful rosebud, that she had used strong language.

We have Shakespeare's authority that a lady may use an oath, for he makes Hotspur say to his wife,

> . . . in good sooth! Heart! you swear like a comfit-maker's wife "Not you' in good sooth," and "As true as I live," and, "As God shall mend me," and, "As sure as day."
>
> And givest such sarcenet surety for thy oaths,
> As if thou never walk'st further than Finsbury.
> Swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art,
> A good mouth-filling oath, and leave "in sooth,"
> And such protest of pepper ginger-bread,
> To velvet-guards and Sunday citizens.

But Shakespeare did not leave on record what a lady's oath should be, and 'tis still only a very "sarcenet surety" that is allowed to them.

"My dear lady," said Marston Sebright, when the dogs were quieted, "I'm only too glad to see in your face that the vile accusations against Miss Temple have no truth in them. I did not believe them for a moment. That poor young man" (alluding to the Vicar) "is evidently the victim of some gossip-loving women. He no doubt means well, but he seems to believe everything he is told. He is, perhaps, not quite the sort of man for the priestly office, but, holding the office, we must believe that he acts with the best intentions, and according to his conscience. There is a certain class of people who,

having no resources in themselves, must seek excitement for the mind somewhere, and gossip forms an easy excitement. To these people, who are much to be pitied, there is a particular fascination in discussing their neighbours' affairs. They are generally people with morbid imaginations, and, by the help of these imaginations they add little by little to everything they hear, till they make up a monstrous story. They may perhaps suffer physically from an excess of gall in the blood. It has often been observed that these people are, for the most part, great tea-drinkers, but what affinity there is between the chemical properties of tea and the minds of these people, I have not yet taken time to investigate, although I think it might be worth while to do so, and also to find out how this vice or disease of gossip might be so turned into a useful channel as to become a virtue. It is argued by many that every particular vice is an excess of some particular virtue; but I have not studied the subject sufficiently to give an opinion on it. It is evident that at present we have to deal with a question in which difficulties have been made by some of these unfortunate people who are given to gossiping, and we must find out whether the mischief can be undone."

Jack is wishing his father wouldn't stop to go into the philosophy of gossip. He wants to bring out the whole story at once to Manly Frowde, and ask him what can be done.

"I daresay we shall manage it between us," said Frowde cheerfully.

He saw how serious and impatient Jack looked.

"Look here, Frowde," said Jack, talking very quickly, "this is what it is: you know when I came here the other day and told you what mother had heard from Mr. Voyd you advised me to tell father all about it. Well, the doctor was there, and I couldn't tell him at once, so I told mother all about it, and said I was waiting to tell father. Mother got in a dreadful way, and said it was impossible I could marry Kate, and showed me a letter from Mr. Temple to her. It seems that Voyd took upon himself to give a message from mother to Mr. Temple about Kate and me, and Mr. Temple wrote the letter and took Kate away. Where's the letter, father? Show it to Mr. Frowde." Jack was excited.

Manly Frowde read the letter first; then his wife read it.

"What a wicked shame!" she exclaimed.

"That is why they went away so suddenly. How can any one be so wicked?"

"We do not know Mr. Temple very intimately," said Manly Frowde. "Still if we could see him, we might make matters straight. He is in town at present."

"Do you think Kate knows anything of it?" said Jack to Mrs. Frowde.. "I fear she may be in great distress about it."

"I think not. But I have not heard from her for about a week, when I told her Mr. Temple would probably hear from you soon."

At this moment Claudia Selfe and Harry Branscombe, accompanied by Mr. Forncett and Harry Rivers, appeared in the garden.

"Here are our young people," said Frowde, "bringing Forncett and his friend with them. By-the-way," he said, turning to Marston Sebright, "this is the man who can probably be of most use to us in this matter. I'll mention it to him presently. He's a man worth knowing—a brother of Lord Ravensbourne. His brother has the estates, and he the brains—an equal division," he said, laughing.

CHAPTER LIV.

A CONSULTATION.

Good morrow, Gossip Joan,
  Where have you been a-walking?
I have for you at home
  A budget full of talking.—*Old Song.*

When Mr. Forncett and the young people went into the cottage, Diana was not with them. She had run across to the post-office to transact some business. If Miss Tattleton had been in a good temper she would no doubt have had something pleasant to say to Diana. For, although her remarks were occasionally somewhat coarse, still she had a kindly way of "chaffing" young people about sweethearts or marriage. The social position of a person made no difference to her. She was free with all. But she happens on this occasion to be in a very bad temper, because of the missing parcel, for which, of course, John got blamed.

"So you've come to have another look at the old place again," said Miss Tattleton. "I wonder you young ladies

don't get married, especially with such a lot of gentlemen as you're always meeting over there," pointing to the cottage.

"We are very happy as we are," said Diana, in a pleasant tone.

Miss Tattleton had seen Diana and Claudia chatting with Mr. Forncett and his friend.

"It's no good setting your cap at either of them," she said, pointing to Mr. Forncett's house. "They're taken up already with the girl over the way, only she can't make up her mind which to have. They're going up to London after her."

Diana always had wit enough to take any one's mood and give an answer. She was excessively graceful in her movements, and a very good actress. She would mimic a voice or manner admirably, and yet do it all with such grace. She said, in a half-serious half-comic tone,

"Dear me, how very sad! Of course I've set my cap at Mr. Forncett. Is there *no* hope? What can we do with that girl over the way?"

She imitated Miss Tattleton's voice, as she repeated her phrases, and yet she did it all so prettily, and then dropped a curtsey, and ran out of the shop.

Miss Tattleton had meant to be spiteful. She knew she had the advantage of every one round Copse Hill in saying spiteful things more spitefully than any one else, and in mimicking a tone or manner. She had made many a woman go out of her shop feeling very uncomfortable at some spiteful remark. She never attacked any one who was likely to be able to give a ready answer; she chose as her victims gentle creatures who were easily frightened. She knew that a lady could not very well answer without appearing unladylike, but Miss Selfe had answered her, and mimicked her, and done it all without in the least losing her dignity.

Diana ran over to the Cottage, and found everyone chatting pleasantly. Jack's affairs had been dropped for the present. When she had been introduced to Marston Sebright, and everyone was at ease, she said,

"Oh! Mr. Forncett and Mr. Rivers, I've heard such shocking things about you. And I've heard it on the very best authority, from the village chronicler. Oh! you dreadful men, I shall give information to the police."

"What is it?" they said, laughing.

"And you coolly ask what is it, when you know you're going to fight a duel about Kate Temple?"

"Fight a duel about Kate Temple!" they both exclaimed.

"Oh, you need not be so innocent about it—you know it's quite true. But there, that's just like you faithless men. There's no chance for me, I see. Oh, my poor broken heart!" She acted all this so well that everyone was laughing. "And now, Jack," she said, jumping up, "I'm told I'm not to set my cap at Mr. Forncett or Mr. Rivers, so I'm going to set it at you. How ought I to do it?" she said, going to a mirror and re-arranging a bit of muslin and ribbon that was on her head. "This way or this? Should the bow be at the back or front, or right or left? You know, Jack, you used to flirt with Kate, and now you can't have her, won't you have me? I shall make a splendid bishopess."

Diana went and stood before Jack with her little cap perched on one side of her head, looking very comical, but she saw an odd expression in Jack's face, and then ever so many thoughts ran through her mind in a moment. Was there really something the matter about Kate? Was Mr. Forncett or Mr. Rivers in love with her, and had she given up Jack?

She saw there was something that gave him pain when she mentioned Kate, and she tried to turn the subject, but she could think of nothing to say. Then fell one of those awkward silences which come sometimes when an unpleasant subject has been mentioned accidentally.

Claudia, who was sitting by Jack, saw the sudden change of expression in her sister's face, and tried to come to the rescue by making an appropriate remark. But she could think of nothing, so she nervously said,

"What a lovely day it has been!"

But this only seemed to make a deeper silence. Presently Manly Frowde said—

"Without any joking, Diana, what was the nonsense you heard about the duel? Did you invent it?"

"I invented the duel, but I was seriously told not to set my cap (that was the expression) at Mr. Forncett or Mr. Rivers."

"By Miss Tattleton, I suppose?" said Frowde.

"Yes; she seemed rather out of temper."

"That's the woman who was so impudent to me yesterday," said Harry Rivers; "she made some very unpleasant remarks about Miss Temple."

"Now, Mr. Sebright, you see the origin of the mischief," said Frowde.

"'Tis wonderful!—'tis marvellous!" said Marston Sebright,

"that a mere uneducated village shopkeeper should be the organ of so much mischief. But she would be powerless, except amongst her own class, unless some person in authority carried away her tales; for surely well-bred people do not concern themselves with village gossips.

"I fear that 'some person in authority' has carried the tale on this occasion."

Mrs. Frowde, thinking that Jack would not like the matter discussed before so large a party, drew away the young people, and left her husband and the Sebrights and Frank Forncett together, returning presently herself.

The matter was quickly explained to Forncett.

Mr. Frowde, knowing the bond of union between him and the Temples, fancied he would be the best person to speak to Mr. Temple.

"You see, Mr. Forncett," said Marston Sebright, "the error has arisen through Mrs. Sebright placing faith in Mr. Voyd. She is over-anxious about our son, and as he and Voyd were at college together, she naturally thought Voyd was earnest in what he said; and no doubt he was, but the poor young man is not quite so prudent as he should be, and has an unfortunate habit of listening to all the old womanish tales he hears."

Jack felt inclined to confess that he was at fault in leading his mother to suppose that he visited the vicar when he came so often to Copse Hill. He could have confessed it to Mrs. Frowde, but felt a little frightened of the men.

"I've no doubt I shall be able to explain the matter satisfactorily to Temple," said Forncett. "I am going to town in a few days—I cannot exactly say which day—and I will make a point of calling on Mr. Temple at once," which Frank Forncett would have done in any case, for he had other reasons for calling on Mr. Temple.

"Don't you think," said Frowde, quite unconscious of the grave charge against him concerning Kate, "that the vicar should be acquainted with the mischief he has caused, and be made to send an apology to Mr. Temple for the terms in which he has mentioned Miss Temple?"

"I mean to make him do it," said Jack vehemently. "He shall retract every bit of it; and make the most abject apology."

"Yes; we'll see to that," said Marston Sebright. "We called on him to-day for an explanation, but he was out, and we'll call early in next week."

"How soon do you think you'll see Mr. Temple?" said Jack to Mr. Forncett.

Jack was in a hurry.

"I can hardly tell you yet. Perhaps I might carry a letter from you?" he said, looking mischievously at Jack.

"That wouldn't be a bad idea. Shall you have gone by Tuesday? We shall be over here then. Father," he said, turning to Marston Sebright, "shall we come over on Tuesday to see Voyd?"

"Perhaps we shall, but don't be in a hurry, my boy—don't be in a hurry; a day or two will not make much difference."

But every day was an age to Jack.

When he could get Mrs. Frowde aside he said,

"May I send her a little note through you? and you will cheer her up, won't you? I'm so afraid she may have heard of all this. Thank you so much," and he showed his gratitude in his face.

The party soon joined again, and were all very merry. Jack began to have hope, so regained his usual spirits. Diana and Claudia saw the change in him, and wondered what it all meant, but were waiting patiently till Mrs. Frowde should tell them. The two Harrys were full of fun and mad pranks, though Harry Branscombe was some dozen years older than Harry Rivers. He was always called "old Harry" at the Cottage, and was a favourite with the ladies, and the men too. Mrs. Frowde had a great belief in "old Harry," and though she was fond of making matches amongst her young people, she would have very reluctantly spared Harry Branscombe.

Marston Sebright and his son had to leave before sunset, as the cross country roads were not in good condition.

Jack looked gratefully at his friends as he bade them good-bye; and as he shook hands with Diana he gave a look as much as to say, "It's all right now."

The Sebrights had quite a large party to see them off from the gate of the cottage, and as they went round the corner by Miss Tattleton's, Jack turned and waved his hand.

"Ah!" grunted Miss Tattleton, watching them through the shop-window, her temper not improved since Diana's visit, "that's one of the men that came dangling after the girl opposite. I wonder who the old 'un is!"

CHAPTER LV.

KATE'S TROUBLES.

From you, Ianthe, little troubles pass—
As little ripples from the shining river.
LANDOR.

MR. TEMPLE and his family were staying at an old-fashioned hotel in Old Burlington Street. After the communication he received from Leonora concerning Kate and Jack, he thought he might perhaps hear something of Jack shortly. He was not disposed to entertain any proposal from him, for he felt that Kate had been grossly insulted by the family. He was hoping that she was not seriously in love with the boy, and that she would soon forget him.

Leonora told Kate nothing more than that no letter had been received from Jack.

A week passed, and still there was no sign. Poor little Kate was getting very miserable, She had the consolation of talking to Leonora about it, but, she noticed that Leonora did not encourage the subject. She felt certain there was something wrong. She wanted to write and ask Mrs. Frowde about it, but Leonora advised her not to do so, but told her to wait patiently.

Mr. Temple and Leonora both feard that Jack had heard some unpleasant stories of Kate, and believed them, and had therefore given up all idea of asking for her; and although Mr. Temple had no wish that Kate should marry, yet he did not like the idea of her being deserted by a lover because she was supposed to have behaved in an unbecoming way.

He was discussing the matter with Leonora on the Saturday that Jack was telling his troubles to the Frowdes. Leonora, seeing that Kate's health was materially affected, was impressing on her brother that something should be done.

"I do not quite see what *is* to be done," said Temple. "If these scandalous reports have induced Mr. Sebright to give up Kate, he can scarcely be worth having. He ought to know how much such gossip is worth."

But you know, William, how much can be done with a plausible tongue: and the word of a clergyman carries so much weight with it. I think it is likely that very serious

mischief has been made, and I am in distress at poor Kate's state of mind. I would do anything that would be likely to set matters right."

"So would I, my dear; but we hear nothing from the young man, and I cannot possibly speak to him till I hear from him."

"Don't you think it would be well to see Mr. Frowde about it, as he is Jack's friend? He is a man of good judgment."

"I think it would not be at all the thing that I should make any advances in the matter, or show any anxiety about it. If the young man loves Kate, he will allow nothing to stand in his way. If he does not come forward, Kate must bear the disappointment. She is very young, and it is not likely to make any impression on her. We must move about a bit. I'll wait till Forncett comes, to know what his arrangements are, and then we'll be on the move. We had better not go back to Winterslow till this miserable gossip is forgotten, lest Kate may hear of it."

"I am going to write a line to Frank," said Leonora. "I suppose it would do no harm just to say something of the matter to him. He might, perhaps, by a word or two with Mr. Frowde, find out how matters stand."

"Forncett is so judicious a man that no mischief can come out of anything you say to him, so write as you like."

Pretty little Kate went wearily to bed every night, wondering what was wrong. She thought Leonora knew more about it than she chose to tell, and she often tried to get her to talk about it. It was only lately that she had begun to understand what disgrace was attached to her mother. She had questioned Leonora so closely that she thought it best to tell the child exactly what happened rather than let her form all sorts of wild theories about it. She wondered over and over again whether Jack had heard this, and therefore would not marry her, and she always tried to console herself with the idea that Jack loved her so very much that he would not give her up for that.

If she could only see him for a few minutes, she thought, everything would be right. Then she wondered how much longer her papa's business would keep him in London, and she asked often when they were going back to Winterslow. Then she longed to ask Mrs. Frowde all about it, she felt sure she must know, and that she could make matters right. Then she tried very hard to bear it all bravely, and not seem to be different from what she always was. But her father could see

a very great difference in her, and he was not comfortable about it. In the first place he was jealous that the child should love another man better than himself. He did not admit this to himself; but undoubtedly he felt it. She had been everything in the world to him. His sister was his companion, but the child had his passionate love. He thought Jack Sebright a fine manly fellow, but he felt a little bitter against him for taking his child's love from him. Then why had Jack burdened the child with a secret all these months and made her deceitful to her father? And why didn't he come now in a straightforward way and ask for the child? And if he had heard the gossip, why didn't he go and horse-whip the man who had said such vile things of Kate? These and various other things passed through Mr. Temple's mind and made him decide that Jack was not what he ought to be. So there was not much chance for Jack when the time should come, and his chances grew less every day, for Mr. Temple was disgusted at having to be at a dull hotel in town instead of enjoying the country air and the society of Frank Forncett, and he seemed to consider it was all through Jack that he had to be there. Jack, he argued, had no right to engage himself secretly to the child, and then behave in such a manner as to allow of comment being made.

So altogether he was very angry with him.

CHAPTER LVI.

A LETTER FROM LEONORA.

A she-correspondent for me, always provided she does not cross.—ISAAC DISRAELI.

ON Sunday morning Frank Forncett was gladdened by a letter from Leonora. It was one of those charming letters which only women can write. A mere friendly letter—for were not Frank and Leonora to be always *friends*—but to Frank every word was precious.

In the afternoon he walked over to the Cottage with it, to show Mrs. Frowde the part relating to Kate. She had already written to Kate, and had tried, as well as she could, to find excuses for Jack's not having written or called, without

telling the actual truth. She had been unable to post her letter because the post goes out from Copse Hill early on Sundays, and there would not be another post out till Monday evening. She re-opened her letter, and sent more words of comfort for Kate, telling her to wait only a few days more and all would come right. And she knew Jack's little enclosure would cheer her. She felt anxious about Kate's health, and asked Mr. Forncett if he would not hurry his visit to town, that he might make matters right with Mr. Temple, and smooth the way for Jack, so that everything could be settled speedily.

"I suppose I had better wait till I see the impetuous youth on Tuesday," said Frank; "you may depend upon it he'll give his father no peace till he comes. Then I'll start at once when I've seen him, and go straight to Temple. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Frowde, "I'm anxious about it because I led the child to believe more than a week ago that Jack was then going to speak to her father, and I feel that I am to blame for having done so, as she is now suffering from the uncertainty and delay."

On Monday the letter to Kate, containing the little note from Jack, was posted. Also a short letter from Mrs. Frowde to Jack, begging him to come on Tuesday, if he possibly could. He did not need any begging.

Marston Sebright saw how anxious his boy was to have the matter settled, and he felt for him, though he pretended to take it very quietly. Jack knew he would go with him on Tuesday, though he could not get him to promise.

On Tuesday morning, at breakfast, while Jack was all eagerness, waiting to see what his father would say, Marston Sebright after leisurely reading his letters, said quietly, as if it were of no importance,

"Well, Jack, what do you think of to-day for our visit to the Vicar of Copse Hill? It seems tolerably fine, I think we might as well get it over."

"All right, father," said Jack, "I'm quite ready to start when you are."

So the father and son were soon on their way, in the dog-cart. Impetuous Jack was relieving his feeelings by abusing the Vicar.

"Don't be abusive, Jack," said his father. "It is not worth your while to lower yourself by using such language, for the sake of a young puppy who sins from stupidity rather

than vice. He is like a young dog who wants taking by the scruff of the neck by a bigger dog, to be shaken into his place. Perhaps after a few mistakes of this sort, he'll become wiser."

"In the meantime," said Jack, "people must, I suppose, suffer for his mistakes. That's the worst part of it. Let's just go round to the Frowdes first for a moment, father, to see if there's any news."

Jack did not know the postal arrangements at Copse Hill on Sunday, and thought perhaps Mrs. Frowde might have written by Sunday's post to Kate, and therefore there might be a little answer from her this morning.

But in this he was disappointed. Mrs. Frowde told him that Mr. Forncett thought of going that afternoon, but she did not mention Kate's being out of health, as she knew the boy's impetuous character, and did not know what he might do.

She reccommended them to go and see Mr. Voyd at once, and, if possible, to get a written apology that Mr. Forncett might carry with him, as it would help very much in pacifying Mr. Temple; and she in the meantime would ask Mr. Forncett to come over to the Cottage, that Jack might see him when he returned from the Vicarage,

They found the Vicar at home, also Mrs. Voyd, and two of what were called in the neighbourhood "the Urgent girls." Some of the Urgent girls were much given to giggling, and as the two present had heard all the scandal about Kate Temple and Jack Sebright, and had, in fact, only just been discussing it, they regarded him with great interest, and sat in a corner of the room nudging one another, and giggling.

Marston Sebright endeavoured to be polite while the weather and other general subjects were discussed, though he felt out of patience. Mrs. Voyd's manner was particularly irritating to him. Hardly a word could be got out of Jack. He showed his disgust in his face. Mrs. Voyd tried her most insinuating ways with him, but he would not be friendly.

Presently Marston Sebright mentioned to the Vicar that he and his son had merely called on business, and that perhaps he could give them a few minutes of his time.

The Vicar therefore led the way into his study. When they had left the room the two girls burst out into a laugh.

"Do be quiet, Emily," said one, giving the other a great nudge. "They'll hear you."

"It isn't me," said the other, "it's you. I say, isn t he handsome?"

"Yes," said the sister; "and what a shame for that nasty girl to catch him!"

"Oh! but she hasn't caught him yet," said Emily.

"I don't call him so handsome," said Mrs. Voyd; "I call him a rude, rough fellow. He'd hardly answer me when I spoke to him. He used to be so different. I suppose it is associating with those horrid people. I do hope Vypar may be the means of preventing it."

"And he's just going to be ordained, isn't he?" said Emily. "Oh, he'd make such a nice curate for papa. I wonder whether he has means, because pa won't engage one without means."

"I'm sure papa would not have him while he has so many objectionable acquaintances," said Mrs. Voyd.

"Oh! but if he got under pa's and ma's management," said one of the sisters, "he'd soon give them up, and then he'd know only our set, and he'd be so nice, I know he would."

"I'm sure he'd intone beautifully," said the other, "he's got such a lovely voice. Do you think he'll come in again before he goes?"

"You silly girl," said Mrs. Voyd. "You've got your head full of him. I don't see anything remarkable in him. He was a very nice young man before he took up so much with the Frowdes and Temples, and I am in hopes Vypar may bring him round again to what he used to be. I know Vypar intends to tell the father to-day what sort of people his son associates with."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE PARSON'S STUDY.

An' please your reverence, I've brought you a sack of the best kidneys, as you said in your sermon yesterday that the *commun taters* did not agree with you.—*Old Tale.*

THE Vicar's study was a small room furnished with just a few books and necesary writing apparatus. The books were rather oddly chosen. The Vicar had not much literature, as may be judged from the fact that, when he was practising a part-song for the penny reading at Copse Hill (he had a mild tenor voice, and belonged to a musical society), he remarked

that the words of the song were so stupid. They were only from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. He knew nothing about Coleridge's *Church and State*, but he probably *thought* he knew all that a parson ought to know. There was such a delightful simplicity in the ignorance of this man. He was so certain he was going through life in the right way and knew all about it, and he did not hesitate to condemn any man who had not the same way of looking at the world as himself. He was quite sure *he* was right, at any rate. As to possessing brain, he had some sort of idea that it was rather a dangerous thing to possess. He thought that people with brain were generally fascinating, but bad, and must be avoided; and he avoided them accordingly. Perhaps they rather avoided him, for stupidity is excessively irritating to quick-brained people.

His study, therefore, was hardly well named, for study is impossible without brains; but this was the room where the complicated sermons, intended to set forth the doctrines of the Church, were compiled from the commentators; and this was where the commentators were consulted and the *Guardian* read. So, if the Rev. Vypar Voyd could be said to study, this was the room in which he did it.

Some socks were lying in the fender, for Mr. Voyd was in perpetual fear of rheumatism, so kept his socks aired by having them continually in the fender till they were wanted. He was also very particular about the airing of his surplice, and of the cushion on which he knelt in the reading-desk. It was one of the few weaknesses to which Mr. Voyd acknowledged—that he was very susceptible of cold.

Mr. Marston Sebright eyed the books somewhat curiously as he took a seat. Mr. Voyd was nervous of Mr. Sebright. He was afraid that perhaps Mrs. Sebright had mentioned the matter to her husband, and he did not know how it would be taken. He could have encountered Jack very well, but he did not like the idea of Mr. Sebright. However, with that dogged sense of duty which he always had, he thought it right to assume the air of a person who has a great responsibility, and he made up his mind that, whatever were Mr. Sebright's opinions, one course lay straight before him—namely, to acquaint Mr. Sebright with the character of the people whom his son had chosen for associates.

"I am exceedingly glad," he began, "to have this opportunity of speaking with you, Mr. Sebright, for I have matters

of importance—of very great importance—which I wish to communicate."

Mr. Sebright did not at all like the idea of a long interview with this slow-thinking and slow-speaking man, so he said rather shortly—

"I do not wish to detain you long, I've merely come on a little matter of business, which can easily be settled."

Mr. Vypar Voyd was always put out when people were quick. His brain did not move fast enough.

"Indeed!" he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Sebright, "my son has proposed marriage to a lady in your parish—Miss Temple. That lady listened to his proposal, but my son was foolish enough to defer consulting her father till he should have some position. In the meantime, the young people, taking advantage of their secret betrothal, have, by their behaviour, given cause for comments. You have heard these comments, and, in your anxiety for my son, have conveyed them to his mother. She, thinking to hide from me what she considered to be the ill-conduct of our boy, unfortunately acted without consulting me. Words dropped by her seem to have been carried to Mr. Temple, and he, supposing you had actually given him a message from Mrs. Sebright, replied with a most polite letter—a letter that puts it out of my son's power to ask for the hand of Miss Temple, unless some explanation is made. Such explanation must come from you, as the person through whom the error arose. All I have to ask, therefore, is that you will write a note to Mr. Temple that I may carry away with me, expressing to him your sorrow at your mistake."

"I can assure you," said Mr. Voyd, who had a certain amount of courage from the confidence that he had much worse things concerning Miss Temple to disclose—"I can solemnly assure you that I had no idea my dear friend, your son, was engaged to Miss Temple."

"Of course not—how should you, as he did not think proper to tell even his parents?"

"If I had known, I should have made no remarks on the familiarities I saw pass between them."

"The brute!" thought Jack, "he's been watching behind a hedge when I kissed the darling."

"I am sorry—excessively sorry—to have said anything concerning your son's conduct which he did not deserve. I am too much interested in him not to be anxious—more than anxious—for his welfare."

"Ugh, the brute!" thought Jack.

"I am sure my son will forgive you—will you not, Jack?"

Jack looked anything but forgiveness.

"I hope, Mr. Sebright," said Mr. Voyd, "that you are assured—quite assured—that I have your son's welfare at heart. Nobody can be more anxious for him than I am. If I thought that it were for his benefit to marry Miss Temple, I would be the first to congratulate him, and move every obstacle out of his way; but, believe me, I am in earnest—truly in earnest—when I say that I view such a union with horror—with absolute horror—for I have no opinion of either Miss Temple or her relations or associates."

"Sir, will you explain?" said Mr. Sebright severely.

"Miss Temple's conduct is the theme of common talk," said Mr. Voyd.

"Oh! I can quite understand that," said Mr. Sebright. "My son was foolish in making a secret engagement. He is answerable for what is said, and so long as the young lady herself is not cognisant of it, it is of little consequence. Of course it would be unpleasant for her to know that any remarks were made."

"But you rather mistake me," said Mr. Voyd. "I mean that Miss Temple's conduct with regard to other gentlemen is such as to make her unworthy—altogether unworthy—of my friend's love."

Jack began to fidget. "Wish the brute wouldn't call me his friend," he thought.

"Mere gossip, I suspect," said Mr. Sebright. "Pretty girl, probably—very young; how old did you say, Jack?"

"Nineteen, father."

"Ah! nineteen—quite a child. I daresay the men run after her. All women like admiration. It's born in them. I attach no importance to that sort of gossip. If you're satisfied, Jack, everyone else may be, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack.

"But, Mr. Sebright, do allow me to impress—most emphatically impress—on you the importance attaching to your son's choice of a wife to help him in his career as a clergyman. I have proof—yes, actual proof—of Miss Temple's intimacy with at least one man, and there are sad reports of her behaviour with others."

"You have actual proof you say, Mr. Voyd? Pray show it unto me."

"I cannot at this moment show it, for I delivered it into

her father's possession, thinking he was the proper man to hold it, and no doubt it was that, with other things, which made him remove his daughter so suddenly."

Marston Sebright looked at his son half doubtingly for a minute, as if it were perhaps possible that the vicar were right and his son had been deceived; but he saw it so plainly written on the boy's face that he was certain of Kate, and certain, also, the vicar was wrong, that he doubted no more. He knew that his son had twenty times the sense of the vicar.

"Look here, Voyd," said Jack, who could bear it no longer. "Tell me all you have to say, and tell it quickly. I can bear anything, you needn't fear. I've heard so much of this nonsense, now let us know once for all exactly what it is, and have done with it."

"Be calm, Jack, be calm," said his father.

"Father, I cannot be calm. What man can be calm when he hears an innocent lady attacked?"

"Let us hear what Mr. Voyd has to say," said Mr. Sebright.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Voyd, "to give you a moment's uneasiness; but I can assure you I feel it my duty to tell you of what has come under my knowledge concerning Miss Temple. Her behaviour with Mr. Forncett is very generally spoken of, and there are eye-witnesses to the fact that she has been seen with Mr. Frowde in the dusk of the evening conducting herself most familiarly with him—in fact, kissing him."

"How very horrid!" said Jack, in a comical tone. "I hope she'll go on kissing him. She will if she becomes my wife."

Mr. Voyd looked reproachfully at Jack, and evidently thought he was only joking.

"I hope you are not serious when you talk like that," said Mr. Voyd.

"Indeed I am," said Jack. "I reverence Mr. Frowde before any man in the world except my father."

"I am sorry—truly sorry—to hear you express such a sentiment, and hope you may some day be led to see your mistake."

"I have not yet," said Mr. Sebright quietly, "been shown the 'actual proof' you mentioned of Miss Temple's misconduct."

"That," said Mr. Voyd, "I am unable at present to show you, as it lies in Mr. Temple's hands."

"What is it?"

"It consists of a letter inadvertently sent by Miss Temple to the laundress in the pocket of her dress——"

"And which," exclaimed Jack excitedly, "instead of being honourably returned, was read by scoundrels who——"

"Jack! Jack!" said his father, "moderate your vehemence. Proceed, Mr. Voyd."

"This letter, which was by accident read, when it was lying on the table at the laundress's, is couched in terms that no gentleman would use to a lady unless on the most familiar terms with her, or most intimately related."

"And Miss Temple *is* on intimate terms with the Frowdes, so what's the harm," exclaimed Jack.

"I'm sorry—truly sorry—for your sake, Sebright, that Miss Temple is on such terms with them. When you know as much of them as I do, you will see the truth of what I say. I'm grieved—intensely grieved—that I am unable to convince you of the danger of associating with such a man as Frowde. That he's clever, I admit—remarkably clever—but his genius only makes him the more dangerous."

"I think, Mr. Voyd," said Mr. Sebright, rising from his seat, "that you may leave my son to the choice of his associates. I will be responsible for any mistake he may make. You have nothing further, I presume, to say of Miss Temple. Can you oblige me by just writing a few lines of apology to her father?"

"Really," said Mr. Voyd, "it gives me pain—great pain—to refuse; but I do not at present feel that Miss Temple's character is altogether cleared from the imputations made on it."

"Then there is nothing more to be done, I think, Jack," said Mr. Sebright, glad of a chance of escape from a man who irritated him so much. "What do you say, Jack?"

"What I say, is," said impetuous Jack, "that I think Forncett and Frowde ought to be told to their face of these beastly imputations on—I mean," he said, thinking his father might be vexed with his language, "that Voyd ought to say what he has to say before them."

"I suppose Mr. Voyd has no objection, have you?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Voyd, a little nervously.

"Not that Frowde is a man who would condescend to defend himself," said Jack.

"Perhaps we had better consult him first," said Mr. Sebright, "and hear what he says about it. An accusation against a man by the Vicar of his parish is a serious thing, or ought to

be, and should either be substantiated or disproved. Mr. Frowde can no doubt enlighten us on the subject. We will see him at once. Good morning, Mr. Voyd."

The gentlemen departed, and the Urgent girls watched them from behind the curtains, giggling as usual.

CHAPTER LVIII.

JACK IMPATIENT.

'Tis all men's office to speak patience
To those that wring under the load of sorrow;
But no man's virtue, nor sufficiency,
To be so moral, when he shall endure
The like himself. *Much Ado about Nothing.*

When Jack and his father arrived at the Cottage, they found there the same party they had met on Saturday. The ladies and Harry Branscombe and Harry Rivers had all in the meantime learnt the history of Jack's troubles; therefore, when he arrived on Tuesday, he was rather regarded as a hero, and much sympathy was felt, especially by the ladies. Diana and Claudia, though they really felt sorry for the annoyance Jack had, were full of fun, and ready to "chaff" him pleasantly about his love-affairs.

"But oh! Di," said Claudia, when they were discussing Jack, "I'm just a little bit frightened of his father; he looks so severe—just like a bishop, and I am so frightened of bishops. We shall never dare to say such things before him."

"What nonsense!" said Diana. "You may depend on it that, however severe he looks, he isn't; you can see that by the way he manages his horse. I should never be frightened of a man who loves his horse so much."

When Marston Sebright greeted Mr. Forncett, he said,

"Here I am again, you see, letting that boy of mine make quite an old fool of me—running after a little girl of nineteen. I think I've done all I can now, and must leave you and the youngsters to do the rest, as you are kind enough to interfere. I hope you may be successful."

Frank wished in his heart that there was as little difficulty

in the way of obtaining Leonora as there seemed to him to be of getting Kate.

"And did you get the apology?" said Frowde.

"No; the vicar seemed to find it against his conscience to give it, and I'm sure I had no wish to force the young man's conscience," said Marston Sebright.

"Then he absolutely refuses it?"

"For the present he does."

"I suspect before long some other apologies will be required," said Jack.

"How?" said Manly Frowde.

"Oh! you very wicked man," said Jack, laughing.

"What have I done? I know the vicar has a long list of sins against me. Is there anything fresh?"

"You've kissed my Kate," said Jack.

"Many times, and hope to do so again," said Frowde.

"And you've written verses to her—'couched in the most familiar language.' Wasn't that the correct expression, father?"

"Something of that sort," said Marston Sebright.

"And have they made mischief of that?" said Mrs. Frowde.

"Yes."

"Oh, how delightful!" she said, clapping her hands; and the dogs all jumped up and joined in. "Why," she continued "I helped to write them all. I generally tell Manly what to say, and he puts it into verse."

"Ah! but these verses must be something you have not seen," said Jack to Mrs. Frowde, "because they're so very familiar. I believe Kate is positively addressed as 'dearest' in them."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Frowde. "It would depend whether 'dear' or 'dearest' suited the metre best."

"Now, really," said Diana, "we're not going to let Miss Temple have all the bad character to herself. We must claim some of it. Why, I've had ever so many kisses, and I'm going to have another, too, you dear old boy," she said, going up to Manly Frowde and kissing him. "And as to verses, I'll be bound Miss Kate can't come up to us in that, for we've known him longer. Why, we've a heap of verses, and hope to have many more yet. If that's how Miss Temple lost her character, she may be proud of the loss; but we're not going to let her claim too large a share of our Manly Frowde. He belongs to ever so many of us, and she is a new friend."

"But, Miss Diana," said Jack, "Kate got kissed in the lane there in 'the dusk of the evening.' Those last words have to be said in a mysterious whisper to give the full effect, don't they, father?"

Jack imitated Mr. Voyd's voice and manner as he said it.

"You bad boy!" said his father.

"I really must put in my claim now," said Claudia. "*I've* been kissed 'in the dusk of the evening.' Is that the right sort of whisper, Jack? I've been kissed many times in the dusk, and in the dark too. For when mamma lived at Winterslow, Manly Frowde always took us home when we had been to dine here, and, of course, I always kissed him when I said 'Good-bye.' Once I remember five gentlemen walked home with me when I had dined here."

"And did you kiss all five?" said Harry Rivers—"because I should like to have been one, if you did."

"No," said Claudia, putting on a pretty little dignified, cold manner; "it is only Mr. Frowde that the ladies kiss. He is a poet, and we consider it is an honour to kiss him."

"Oh, dear, how I wish I was a poet!" said Harry Rivers. "If I write you some verses, Miss Claudia, shall I be rewarded with a kiss?"

"Certainly not, sir. You must show you are a real troubadour like Manly Frowde before the ladies will reward you."

"What a lucky man you are, Frowde!" said Harry Rivers. "How I envy you!"

"You need hardly do that," said Manly Frowde. "I'm poor enough, for poetry won't bring money, though it brings kisses. Still I have what money won't buy—the loyal love and friendship of some half-dozen true women. I would not change it for gold; but I should be sorry to see you have to battle with life as I have."

"Why Manly," said Mrs. Frowde, "that sounds almost like a grumble; and you are always so content."

"So I am, my child—so I am. I only wanted to show this youngster that, if he envies me my kisses, he also has something which I have not."

"Ah, there's something else, Mr. Rivers," said Mr. Sebright, "you might envy Mr. Frowde besides the kisses. We all envy him, not only his great powers of body and mind, but his way of exercising them. He has the satisfaction of knowing that he is of infinite use to many of his fellow-creatures."

"Such a sentiment from you," said Frowde, looking pleased, "is worth having. I thank you for it, as I thank these ladies

for their love. I need some championship with such a very formidable enemy as the vicar of the parish," he added, laughing, "and I'm proud of my champions."

"But who's going to defend you, Mr. Forncett?" said Jack. "You also are one of the wicked."

"What have I done?" said Frank.

"I don't know whether you've actually kissed my Kate——" began Jack.

"Indeed I have," interrupted Frank.

"Whatever you've done, it has to be mentioned in a most mysterious whisper;" and Jack lowered his voice in imitation of the vicar's again.

"Really, I plead guilty to having kissed the little lady several times in presence of her father. You see," he said gaily, trying to speak lightly of his misfortunes, "I claim a sort of uncleship. I just missed the chance of being her uncle, and have ever since repented it."

"Then you would have been my uncle, Frank! What fun! I don't feel at all respectful towards you, old boy."

"You'd better take care, Jack. There's no knowing what may happen. He may some day be your uncle after all, and then he'll come down on you with avuncular severity," said Manly Frowde.

"But I haven't got the niece yet," said Jack solemnly, feeling that there was Mr. Temple to get over, after all, and he seemed a formidable person to Jack.

"I daresay we shall manage that," said Frank Forncett cheerfully. "I mean to go up this evening, and go straight to Temple, because Kate is not at all well, and the sooner it is settled the better."

"Kate ill!" said Jack.

"Well," said Forncett, "she is far from well."

"What *is* the matter?" exclaimed Jack hastily.

"Oh, it's nothing serious," said Frank; "but I don't quite know what it is." He felt that it was awkward to explain it all to Jack. "I have a letter from—from her aunt," he said nervously. After the confession that he might have been Kate's uncle, he found a difficulty in knowing what term to apply to Leonora. To him she was only Leonora. He could not make up his mind to call her Mrs. Lifton, and he felt that Miss Temple was incorrect, and might cause conjecture as to why there was any difficulty in the way of marrying her. If he spoke of her as Kate's aunt, everyone present would at once infer that she was connected with the uncleship he had so

lately mentioned; and of course everyone did. He felt for the letter in his pocket, and producing it, he pointed out a certain part to Jack, who read it.

"Oh, confound it!" said Jack. "Look here, father, I really must go up to town directly. Here's Kate very ill, and all through me—what a brute I am!" He reads—"'She is evidently suffering very much, but bears it bravely.' Of course she does—that's just like her. What a brute I am! Father, I really must go to town at once. Where is she, Mr. Forncett? Can I go with you? Of course she's very ill; she's heard all these vile things, I believe. Oh! how I hate interfering parsons! What time's the next train? Don't let us lose any time."

"Jack, my boy," said his father, "do take things more quietly. You have yourself to blame for making her keep the engagement secret."

"I do blame myself a thousand times, father, but that won't do any good. I must go to her at once. What may she not have suffered? What a wretch I am!—it's all my fault!"

"I think, perhaps," said Forncett to Mr. Sebright, "it might not be amiss if your son came up to town with me. He can stay at my quarters. Rivers will remain a day or two with me, and they can take care of each other."

"You're very kind," said Marston Sebright. "I'm sure Jack ought to thank you. I'll beg his mother to send off what he may want directly I reach home. It shall be taken to the station this evening."

"How soon shall we go?" said Jack, all impatience.

"We must start in half an hour," said Frank, "so you'd better come over to The Birches at once; but when we reach town, you and Harry must go on to my hotel, and I will go straight to Temple at once."

"But why can't I come too?" said Jack.

"You wouldn't like to be refused admittance, would you?"

"No; but when shall I see Kate?"

"You must wait patiently till to-morrow morning."

So impetuous Jack had to make up his mind to wait till the next day.

CHAPTER LIX.

LORD ARUN VISITS MR. JOHNSON.

Ah, the good Priest I love—with ample mind,
True as an Angel, as a Father kind,
Who strives to follow where the Saviour trod,
Who knows the almighty charity of God.
He does not fidget about copes or chants,
Nor patronize parochial sycophants.
* * * * * * *
No : on the glorious pedestal he stands,
Built by divine and apostolic hands,
High above that dull atmosphere impure,
Which you enjoy—which he could not endure.
Slander grows dumb before his searching eye,
And the indignant warmth of his reply.—M. C.

ARUNDEL LIFTON kept his word with Lord Arun, and in about a fortnight from the time of his visit he informed him that Flora had joined a sisterhood, which was the best thing she could do, Lifton added, and 'twas a pity to disturb her. He further mentioned that she was very comfortable, had everything she wanted, and was well taken care of, and that if Valentine wished her address he could have it.

Lord Arun hardly knew what to do. He did not believe that Flora could be so happy as his cousin made out.

"Shut up in one of those horrid dark places!" he said to himself. "By Jove, it must be awful! Wonder whether I shall see her in the street some day, like some of those women one meets; by Jove, quite too awful to think of; they always give me a shudder. Have their faces bound up in linen, and wear black clothes. Horrid idea! Poor little Flora! Don't believe she'll stand it. Wasn't made for that sort of thing; it'll kill her. Must see Lifton, by Jove, I must!"

So Lord Arun called on Arundel Lifton, and asked him further particulars.

"Well, I can't say much about it," said Lifton; "but the bankers referred me to a something Johnson—got the address somewhere here—he knows all about it. Oh! here it is. Reverend James Johnson. There's the address; better go and call; it will be a nice amusement for you. He'll give you some ghostly advice before he's done with you, which will do you good, for you know what a sinner you are, Val. He'll have you on your knees at confession before long, and then

he'll be persuading you to give something to the Church for the good of your soul."

"I ain't quite such a fool as you think me, Arundel."

"Well, I think you're a fool to go running after a woman when she's done the best thing she can for herself, and got out of the way. Why not leave her alone?"

"You know, Arundel, you have done more than anyone to drive her to this, 'pon honour, you have," said Valentine, with warmth.

"And a very good thing to have driven her to," said Lifton. "Didn't know she had so much sense."

"Arundel, I consider you are in honour bound to look after her now. Don't you see she wouldn't have done it if she weren't miserable."

"Talk of honour with a creature of that sort? What does she know of honour?"

"That's your fault," said Valentine, in a rage.

"Well, look here, Val, don't get so confoundedly abusive. I hate scenes. Go and see your parson, and then come and tell me what he advises, and we'll see about it."

"Won't you come with me?"

"That's likely, Val. If you like going about the world inquiring after women with damaged reputations, I don't. I'm not going to have my name mixed up in it."

So Lord Arun went to call on Mr. Johnson. Now Valentine was one of those unselfish creatures that always forget themselves when interested in others, and it never occurred to him that Mr. Johnson would have any suspicion of him. He was quite free from blame, and his behaviour to Flora had always been perfectly honourable, so he saw nothing to fear. He was always nervous with strangers, and when nervous found it difficult to put his sentences together properly.

So he did not favourably impress Mr. Johnson when he went in. He was short-sighted, and when he was talking to anyone, generally put up an eye-glass to one eye, and so screwed up the other that it gave him rather a comical expression. He was considered by many people to be good-looking, but the simplicity of character which made him so lovable to some, made him ridiculous to others. He was tall and unformed, but unmistakably a gentleman.

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?" said Mr. Johnson, who was a man of particularly severe appearance, though he could be tender when he liked. On this occasion he appeared to be very severe.

"Really," said Valentine, rising and putting up the eyeglass, "I came, don't you see, to inquire about a lady of my acquaintance."

Mr. Johnson looked mystified.

"Yes?" he said.

Valentine found it difficult to get on.

"And to know if she was happy, don't you know?" he jerked out nervously.

"I don't quite understand you," said Mr. Johnson. "Have you mistaken the house?"

"'Pon honour, I don't know," said Valentine, rather relieved at the idea that he might have done so, and that the real Mr. Johnson might be somebody less awful. "Johnson. Reverend Something Johnson," said Valentine, pulling out the address from his waistcoat pocket.

"Johnson is my name," said the Rector.

"Well, don't you see, I was interested in this lady."

"May I ask her name?"

"Oh! certainly. Flora—Flora—dear me!" and he began to stammer, and look very red.

"You don't seem to know her name," said the Rector, evidently thinking it would do the young man good to be severe with him.

"Well, really now, 'pon honour, can't say I do. Very awkward, by Jove! deuced awkward! Used to call herself Trevor, don't you see."

"I don't understand you, sir," said the Rector. He really had begun to understand the situation, but he imagined Lord Arun was some bad, thoughtless fellow, who had helped to ruin Flora, so he took no pity on him.

"By Jove! didn't think of this difficulty." Valentine dropped his eyeglass, and stared at the carpet, and then put it up again and looked in the Rector's face for help, but saw none there.

"Awkard thing, don't you see—deuced awkward! Wasn't noticed in society, so went under a false name, poor thing! Was divorced, don't you know."

"Do I understand that this unfortunate lady you mention is in any way connected with me?"

"Yes; gone to a what-d'ye-call-it, don't you see. Shut up, wear black clothes, and that sort of thing."

"You mean she has joined the sisterhood?"

"Yes, that's it; nunnery, you know—sort of thing old Newdegate pitches into."

Mr. Johnson looked very much shocked.

"I think, sir," he said, "you might, in my presence, speak a little more reverently, and make less allusion to the heathen gods."

"Heathen gods! Yes, by Jove! devilish bad habit. Beg pardon."

"Then I understand you have come to inquire after a lady who has joined our sisterhood?"

"That's it," said Val, saying to himself, "Old buffer might have found it out before, if he wasn't so thick!"

"May I ask in what relation you stand to the lady, that you come to inquire for her?"

"Well, I'm not exactly a relation, don't you see, but my cousin, you know, married her. Let me see—I can't quite make it out either; but, don't you see, that's how I came to know her."

"Then you really are no relation."

"I can't say that I am."

"Then I do not see how you can be interested in a lady who has voluntarily retired from the world, and has expressed no wish to see any of her friends. You seem to know something of her life, and, therefore, I am sure you will agree with me that it would be undesirable for her to see any of her former——" the Rector hesitated for a word. He would have preferred one which would convey his real meaning to Valentine, and plainly include Valentine as one of Flora's lovers; but he found such a word difficult, and said "associates." Valentine did not see his meaning.

"'Pon honour, you know, I'm really interested in the poor girl, and would do anything in the world for her."

The Rector began to be puzzled. The simplicity of Valentine's character dawned on him.

"May I be curious enough to ask your name?" said the Rector.

"Oh, certainly, Arun, you know, Lord Arun." He searched in his pocket for a card. "Park Lane, you know. Glad to see you any time, and know what I can do for the poor creature."

The Rector began almost to admire the frank simplicity of the man.

"Then I understand that your object is simply to assist this lady in any way you can."

"Yes, don't you see, I want to know all about it; afraid she isn't happy shut up there in the black clothes."

The Rector smiled at Lord Arun's way of putting it, and assured him that all the sisters were quite happy. "But," he added, "this lady is, unfortunately, very ill."

"Flora very ill! By Jove, what can I do?"

"Everything is done for her that can be done."

"But shouldn't she travel? she always liked change so much."

"I fear she is past travel."

"Flora past travel. Good heavens, and I have brought her to this!"

The Rector looked severe.

"If you have any sin on your soul, my Lord," he said, "had you not better unburden yourself."

"No, 'pon honour, don't you see, I mean it was through me she went there."

"But surely you have done something to make her take the step."

"No, I only asked her to marry me, you know, and she wouldn't; most honourable of her, you see, because I didn't know then. Would do anything for her now, poor girl. Hadn't I better see her? Where's the place?"

"I really think, my Lord, if you will be advised by me, it will be a pity for you to see her; she gets very excitable, and they have to keep her quiet."

"Fancy poor Flora being kept quiet," said Valentine, half to himself. Then turning to Mr. Johnson, he said, "May I send a little note to her, asking if she would like to see me?"

"There can be no objection, that I see," said Mr. Johnson. "I hardly imagine she will."

"But if she does, I may go?"

"Certainly, my Lord; there's no rule against it."

"Then I will let you have the note, Mr. Johnson, as soon as possible, and you will quickly let me have the answer."

"Certainly."

"And, you know, Mr. Johnson," said Valentine nervously, thinking clergymen always wanted money for church, or schools, or something, "don't you see, I shall be very glad to help, you know, restoring church, or anything of that kind."

"Oh! thank you!" said the Rector; smiling, "we've a good modern church, which does not want any restoration, but a parish priest can always find plenty of use for money. The schools attached to the home are a great expense."

"Glad to hear it," said Valentine. He meant he was glad of the chance of giving a subscription. "I'll send a cheque with the note. Good morning, sir, good morning. I'm much obliged to you;" and Lord Arun dropped his eyeglass, and walked quickly out.

CHAPTER LX.

MR. TEMPLE'S VISITOR.

Could we but sketch, with the pen of true genius, the model Rector of an English parish, what a grand picture he would be on the canvas! Vandyck should paint him. The man who, with a clear view of the high central truth, has a deep sympathy with humanity in its worst troubles; who turns undazzled from the Great White Throne and carries its light into wretched hovels and into the minds of wretched men; who strives to interpret the thought of God by the work of what we call nature; who deems no science useless, no creature soulless—that is the true parson.—*A Fight with Fortune.*

ABOUT a week after Lord Arun's visit to Mr. Johnson, a note came to him from the Rector, informing him that there was no prospect of Flora's recovery, and that she would be pleased to see him before she died.

Lord Arun, who never could look upon Flora as sinning, but only sinned against, felt sincerely sorry. He imagined that it was his fault that Flora had shut herself up, and he could not forgive himself. He went to his cousin to talk the matter over and see what could be done.

"Poor little wretch, it's the best thing that can happen to her. She'd have been wretched if she had outlived the admiration of the men. She cared for nothing else, and in a few more years she would have been hideous," said Arundel Lifton.

"How unfeeling you are!" said Valentine. "Now she is dying you might have some pity on her. You must go down with me, you know."

"Really, Valentine, you are too ridiculous. What good can we do by going to see the poor wretch in a dying state, looking a horrid sight, with none of her paint and hair-dye on. Ugh! awful idea! I'd rather not, Val."

"By Jove! Arundel, you must be a fiend to talk in that way, after ruining that poor girl." Valentine spoke fiercely.

"Now, Val, for God's sake don't let us have any more scenes about this wretched business. I can't stand a scene. Anything for a quiet life. If you want company on the way, say so, and I'll come. Where is the place?"

Valentine told him.

"Well, then, look here; we'll drive down, and put up at the inn in the town. It's a decent kind of place, as a coach runs

there in the summer. I've sometimes tooled it down. And I daresay they've plenty of accommodation just now when the coaches are not on the road. Couldn't stand it more than one night there, you know. I suppose you're not in a hurry."

"In a hurry! Why, don't you see, she might die while you're waiting."

"Well, this is Saturday, we can't go to-night, we'll start to-morrow, and then you can go over to see her on Monday morning, and we'll start back again early in the afternoon."

"But you'll go to see her too, Arundel."

"Shall I? We'll see about that."

"But I mean you to go."

"Indeed."

Arundel Lifton hated a scene, and few people ever dared to get angry with him. Valentine had gone further than anyone, and had in some measure come to be able to manage his cousin. Whether the simplicity of his character made him quite unconscious of the depths of villany of which his cousin was capable, and so prevented him from having the same fear of him that other people had, or whether Lifton was himself puzzled with Valentine's simplicity, and had unconsciously allowed him to manage him, it is impossible to say; one thing is certain, that no one except Valentine ever dared to order Arundel Lifton to do anything.

Perhaps in the wicked, cold, cruel man there had grown up a love for the simple, awkward, gentle boy—the boy who was as incapable of doing anything dishonourable as he was of putting a sentence together properly.

So on Sunday afternoon Arundel Lifton and Lord Arun are being carried swiftly southward out of London. On that same day Frank Forncett received the letter from Leonora which he showed to the Frowdes.

Jack, on that Sunday afternoon, was at home, wondering whether Frank Forncett would manage Mr. Temple. And poor little Kate sat in a big, dull room in Old Burlington Street, with her eyes on a book, and her thoughts some miles away.

On Monday morning Mr. Temple had a very early visitor. Mr. Johnson was announced.

"I come on an awkward mission," said the Rector, "but I am sure you will understand that a clergyman has often strange duties to perform."

"I am aware of it," said Mr. Temple.

He began to wonder how many more clergymen were

coming to him on awkward missions. "But this man is at least a gentleman," he said to himself.

"I am sure," said the Rector, "you will excuse me if I am compelled to mention a painful circumstance connected with your family—I mean your divorce."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Temple—"if it is necessary for you to mention it."

"It is, unfortunately. The lady to whom you were married is ill."

"Indeed! I hope she is well cared for?"

"Yes, everything has been done; but there seems little hope of her recovery. I fear she is fast dying."

Mr. Temple was a man unaccustomed to show any emotion even to those he loved. The same power which had made him so useful a diplomatist in his earlier years, enabled him to keep the muscles of his face unmoved or the tone of his voice unaltered during any period of excitement. But now the colour left his face. It is difficult to say what feeling passed through his mind that should so affect him outwardly. It could not be grief. Was it joy at the prospect of an immediate end to the years of disgrace that he and Kate had suffered? At least, he had suffered for himself and the child too, and now she was beginning to suffer.

He found it difficult to speak for a moment. His heart had seemed to be still for a time, and then it began to thump fiercely. When he spoke it sounded to him as if his voice came from another part of the room.

"Where is she?" he said.

The Rector explained where she was, and why she had gone there. Mr. Temple's face softened as he heard of her repentance.

"Can I do anything for her?" he said.

"Yes; you can grant her dying request—and I am sure you will."

"What is it?"

"She wishes to see her child——"

"It is impossible."

"But think for one moment—would you refuse so small a favour to a dying woman?"

"It is impossible. I could not bear the thought of it;" and Mr. Temple added something in an undertone, as if to himself, in which the Rector caught the word "contamination."

"The best of us are but great sinners in the sight of God,

so how shall we judge one another? Christ, who was without sin, was merciful; how, then, can we refuse to be merciful to one another? I pray you, sir, consider what you are doing in refusing the request of a poor repentant sinner."

"But think of my child—what effect it may have on her. It will be an unpleasant remembrance for her whole life."

"It may be unpleasant at first, but surely it will be pleasant after. It is good and wholesome for the young to know of trouble, and to have stern lessons in their youth; it fits them for life."

Mr. Temple hardly agreed with this theory of the Rector's. He considered that, life being open to so much trouble, youth should be made as pleasant a period as possible, and he had endeavoured to keep from Kate as much as possible the knowledge of evil. He had until lately succeeded very well, but Kate's little love-troubles had come, and she had insisted on learning from Leonora all about her mother, and was beginning to look at life very seriously indeed.

William Temple did not want his daughter to look seriously at life for a long time to come. He liked to have the fresh, happy, joyous girl always about with him, chattering pretty nonsense to him, and pretty sense too sometimes, for she was very sensible. The great trouble of his life seemed to be always with him, and it made him a sad and silent man. But this little daughter could charm away his sadness. He liked to have her always with him, and he liked her to be always the same happy careless Kate, unconscious of trouble or care. He had seen the change coming over her lately, and it vexed him. Since she had so changed, she had taken more pains to please her father. Experience of trouble generally makes good people better—that is, it makes them more unselfish, and more thoughtful of everyone. Mr. Temple knew this well enough, and understood why the child seemed more anxious to please him. But it was just what he did not want. It was the unconscious happiness of the child that did him so much good. It seemed to be just the antidote to his complaint—that incurable complaint of sadness caused by a trouble that cannot be overcome.

A weight had come on his spirits since Kate had learnt what trouble was. She was no longer the bright, beautiful little spirit that had tripped along gaily by his side, surrounding him with an atmosphere of light, so that his cares seemed far off in a mist; but she was now the thoughtful little woman that could share his sadness and sympathise with him.

Therefore, when Mr. Johnson proposed that she should see her mother, Mr. Temple was in no mood to accede to the proposal. He was already smarting under the effects of Kate's new knowledge, and he was determined to save her any further trouble if he could. But Mr. Johnson's arguments were strong. He felt that it would be cruel to refuse.

"Do you think she would be contented if she saw me, and not my daughter?" he said.

"I think not. She has some jewels which she tells me you gave her, and she wishes to place them in her daughter's hands."

Mr. Temple shuddered. He would rather not see the jewels again, and he hated to hear Kate spoken of as *her* daughter.

"Could not my daughter be excused on account of her health? She is not well, and this meeting may have a serious effect on her."

"I think, under such painful circumstances, great sacrifices might be made," said the Rector reproachfully. "Great though the sins of this woman have been, she may have passed through much suffering. She has shown by her life lately that she is truly repentant. I think we should do what we can to ease her mind before she passes out of this world."

"Well, I must consent," said Mr. Temple. "Did she express any wish to see me?"

"She did not say she would rather not see you, but she seemed a little frightened when it was mentioned."

Mr. Temple did not like to hear this. He felt it was such a terrible reproach. He had so often blamed himself for not better understanding Flora in the early years. She had the same bright happy temper as Kate, but had not been brought up with the same loving care. She was a mere girl when Temple married her, and she required a husband who would be a father and husband too. The young diplomatist was then full of high hopes and ambitions. He meant to make a name and a position, and he looked upon his wife as a beautiful woman, who would share that position gracefully. He forgot that she was a mere child, who wanted to be petted and caressed. It took him a long time to realize the mistake he made; indeed he never fully realized it till he saw his little Kate growing up the same bright, beautiful creature. And then he found out that there is some other knowledge required in the world besides that of diplomacy—namely, a knowledge of human nature.

"She will not object to seeing me, I suppose. I should like to accompany my daughter."

"I should think she would not. I am sure you will feel that, however she has sinned against you, you can grant her forgiveness. She will soon be in other hands than ours, when, let us hope, she will find mercy. We now, as sinners ourselves, can do nothing but forgive."

The Rector evidently judged Mr. Temple to be a severe man, and used such arguments as he thought would touch him. But the arguments were scarcely necessary. Mr. Temple was already touched. He was both severe and tender-hearted. The severity belonged to him naturally. The tenderness had grown on him in later years. The tender point was touched when the Rector mentioned that Flora was frightened of him. His humanity came to the front, and the Rector's Christianity was unnecessary. But perhaps humanity is Christianity, or Christianity humanity. Mere words will not always express an idea. When Christ gave to his few followers those beautiful precepts which were to teach men how to live, he scarcely supposed that there were not many who had been on the earth before him that had lived according to those precepts; that is to say, that there were Christians before Christ came: so now there are some who, not having heard of Christ, yet practise the humanity and kindness that Christ taught.

But such a sentiment as this would shock Mr. Johnson, who not only had much humanity in him, but professed every doctrine of the Church.

"When shall we go?" said Mr. Temple.

"I think no time should be lost," said the Rector.

"Is it easy of access?"

"Exceedingly: there are trains frequently."

"Is there an inn in the place?"

"A very good one in the town. The Home is about two miles from the town."

"Had we better go to-day?"

"It would be kind in you to do so. I don't think she can last much longer."

Mr. Temple looked at his watch, and rang the bell for a time-table.

"You have," said the Rector, "a sister living with you, I understand."

"I have," said Mr. Temple.

"The poor dying creature said she should like to ask her forgiveness."

"I am sure my sister will grant it," said Mr. Temple,

trying to speak in his usual tone. "She will, I daresay, not object to come with us. I will ask her."

"We must now have only pity for her," said Mr. Johnson, rising, still afraid, from Mr. Temple's manner, that he was severe.

They shook hands, and the Rector left, Mr. Temple promising him that he would go by the earliest train he could conveniently get.

CHAPTER LXI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Hearts are not flint, and flints are rent;
Hearts are not steel, and steel is bent.—SCOTT.

IT was considered advisable by Leonora, when her brother consulted her, not to tell Kate of the visit she was about to make.

Kate, still in distress about Jack, for Mrs. Frowde's letter was at present in the post-office, could only connect the sudden movement with her own trouble, and wondered whether she was being taken out of Jack's way. But she knew she must not vex her father by appearing unwilling to go, so she made the best of it, and tried to chat as gaily as usual while they travelled. At the station for which they were bound, they engaged a fly to take them to the inn. When they arrived at the inn, they found there was no private sitting-room they could have.

"There are two gentlemen who have one," said the landlady, "but I think they're going away this afternoon. I'll send and ask. Maybe, they won't mind giving up the room to the ladies, and going in the coffee-room, if they stay."

A servant went up to the room in question. There was Arundel Lifton stretched out on the sofa, looking very unlike moving, and Lord Arun standing on the hearth-rug looking impatient.

The servant delivered his message.

"Dash'd if I'm going to stir," said Lifton. "Look here, Val, I'm done up; I've got a regular fit of blue devils. Can't you put off that errand of yours till to-morrow, like a sensible fellow, and just stay here with me to-night? There's no other fellow I care to have about me."

"No," said Valentine, very decisively. "She trusted me to do it, and I will. I shall get off by train at once. You can stay or not, as you like, but you might give up your room to these ladies."

"That I certainly shall not. You know I can't stand anyone about me when I have these fits—no, I'm not going to give up this room to-day," he said, turning to the waiter.

"Very well, sir."

But Valentine was far too chivalrous to allow ladies to be wanting a room which he was occupying, so he thought he would go down and find out who the ladies were and see what could be done.

He followed the waiter, and went to speak to the landlady.

"These ladies," said the landlady apologetically, "want a room, my lord, and I thought you were perhaps going away to-day."

"Yes, I am," said Valentine. He put up his eye-glass, as was his custom when about to speak to anyone, and turned round to explain to the ladies that a friend was occupying his room, but would doubtless give it up, when he suddenly recognised the Temples.

"Really, now," he said, shaking hands, "I am, don't you see, quite startled. So very odd too, you know, was just going to look for you. 'Pon honour, I'm glad to see you."

Mr. Temple, who had seen little of Lord Arun on the night he was at Forncett's house, and did not know his peculiarities, was somewhat astonished. And he wondered why he should be looking for him. Mr. Johnson, when he told the history of Flora's repentance, did not mention Lord Arun's name, from motives of delicacy, thinking it might somewhat damage the young nobleman's character, as the world would hardly believe he had acted from entirely disinterested motives.

"I'm much obliged to you," said Mr. Temple, hardly knowing what was really the best thing to say to so enthusiastic a greeting from a man who was almost a stranger.

"By Jove! you know, I was just going to rush off to find you—meant to see you to-night somehow, you know."

Mr. Temple looked more mystified than ever.

"May I ask what your business was with me?"

"Why, don't you see I've just been to see——" but here a great difficulty came in the way. Lord Arun did not know what to call Flora. "Mrs. Temple" wouldn't do, he thought. "By Jove!" he said to himself, "what is her name?" He pulled his eye-glass out of his eye and put it back again,

to get inspiration how to proceed. "Don't you see," he said, coming back to his inevitable phrase, "I've just been over to —let me see, where is it—what's the name of that place we had the cab for this morning, Mrs. Price?"

Mrs. Price was the landlady.

"'The Home,' my lord."

"Ah, yes; don't you see, I've been to the Home; but—dear me, I'm keeping the ladies standing; where can I offer you a seat, dear me!"

"Won't you show them up to your room, my lord?" said Mrs. Price.

"Yes, of course—of course—this way." Now Lord Arun was so nervous and confused, first at meeting the Temples and then at the difficulty about Flora's name, that he entirely forgot for the moment the relationship between his cousin and Leonora.

Kate wondered what it could all mean, and, not knowing the sadness behind it, was laughing at Valentine taking his long legs and body nervously up the stairs two steps at a time, talking disconnectedly all the way.

"What a funny man he is!" she whispered to Leonora, as her father followed Valentine in.

Arundel Lifton had thrown himself back on the sofa and closed his eyes. He had an unusually severe fit of what he called blue devils coming on.

Valentine walked into the room, followed by Mr. Temple, who saw the figure on the sofa, but did not recognise for the moment who it was. Leonora and Kate followed.

Lifton did not open his eyes, but hearing Val's quick, nervous step, which was easily recognisable, he said—

"Curse you, Val! for taking me to see that poor little wretch this morning. You seem to take a delight in bringing me face to face with my old sins. Ugh! I can't get it out of my head," and he put his hands over his eyes and pressed them down as if he would press out some vision that was haunting him.

Now when once Lifton began to speak Val became conscious of the horrible position in which he had placed everybody.

"Oh! really—dear me, what can I do?" he said, taking up his eye-glass as if to be ready for anything, and walking towards the door and back again, "'Pon honour, this is awkward."

"What's awkward?" said Lifton, looking up.

For a moment he looked as if he could not realise what he saw. He sat straight up on the sofa.

If it had been Mr. Temple only he would probably have been cool enough. He had come face to face with him on two or three occasions since he had done him the great wrong; but Arundel Lifton was a cold, cruel man, and he could face Mr. Temple apparently unmoved.

But Leonora he had never met in all those years. He had seen her, had often, indeed, gone out of his way to look at her, though he would never have admitted it to anybody; but they never accidentally met.

When these terrible fits came on him there was always one face haunting him, and that face was Leonora's. When he sat upright on the sofa and saw her, he stared at her earnestly for a minute.

In the meantime Mr. Temple had intimated to Valentine that they had better leave the room.

Val was opening the door and they were just leaving the room when Lifton cried out piteously, and in an almost unearthly voice,

"Leonora!"

Mr. Temple pushed Kate and Leonora hurriedly out and closed the door.

The excitement of the morning had already weakened Leonora's nerves. The scene which had just occurred, although, perhaps, it only lasted a few seconds, was too much for her, and she staggered forward, catching hold of the balustrade.

William Temple caught hold of her, and with Valentine's assistance carried her into the nearest bedroom, which happened to be Lifton's.

Val rushed about uttering his disconnected scraps of talk, mixing up blame of himself and pity for Leonora into a regular jumble. Kate was in great distress. She could not make out what was the matter. She began to think the world was full of mystery. The man in the next room had frightened her too; she thought he must be a madman, for he looked so strange, and his shout of "Leonora" was still ringing in her ears. She looked round nervously at the door as if she thought he might come in, and her face was so white that her father was afraid she also would faint.

"Why, my little Kate, how frightened you look," said Mr. Temple, putting on a cheerful tone, "there's nothing particular the matter. Mamma's a little bit tired, and the man in that room frightened her. Rub her hands. She'll soon be better."

"Who is he, papa, is he a madman?"

"He looks like it, child."

"Will he follow us, do you think? I'm so frightened of him."

"No, child, you're safe here."

Although Leonora recovered conciousness soon, she looked so ill that her brother determined she should not go to the Home that day, whatever happened. The room occupied by Lifton and Lord Arun was placed at their disposal, but Leonora could not bear to go into it again. So a fire was lighted in her bedroom, and she and Kate, both looking very pale, were placed there.

Mr. Temple found out from Valentine that Flora was really very bad, and could hardly speak, and would probably not live many hours; but he did not convey this information to Leonora, as he knew she would be anxious to go and see her, and she was not in a fit state to go. She went to bed early, hoping that a long night's rest would restore her, and Kate, who could not get over her terror of "the madman," as she called him, slept in Leonora's room. Valentine tried to pursuade Lifton to leave the house, but he was not be persuaded. He had but one idea in his mind, he was in the same house with Leonora, and he would never leave it while she was there. Wishing to be alone, or at least to have no company but Val's, he retired to his bedroom. There he found a handkerchief, dropped in the confusion when Leonora fainted. He looked at the mark. It was simply "Leonora." He sat down clasping the handkerchief tightly between his fingers.

He sat quite motionless for a long time, as he always did when these fits came on him. Then Valentine appeared, and begged him to have some dinner, but he refused.

"Now, Arundel, you know, don't be a fool! Don't you see, it was an awkward thing. I didn't mean it. Quite a mistake, 'pon honour. Do have some dinner."

"Don't bother, Val! Don't you see, you young idiot, that I'm very glad you *did* make the mistake. Why, I've spoken to her once again!" he exclaimed fiercely, starting from his seat. "I've called her by her name. Here's her handkerchief. See her name. I love her madly, passionately. I would give every penny I have in the world to have her once more—every bit of that cursed money which has made a devil of me. You young fools don't know what it is to love—to have a burning, inextinguishable love. I tell you, my love for that woman will kill me. It is killing me!"

His face turned white as he said this, and he lost the mad power which had seemed to possess him for a few moments.

"Sit down, Arundel, and be quiet. You're making yourself ill."

"It's best to leave me alone, boy. I am glad to see you; but don't bother me to eat anything, or to move. I shall be better to-morrow."

Lord Arun went to see him again several times before he went to bed, but he found him always in the same mood.

"Good night, Arundel," he said, when he saw him for the last time. "I hope, you know, that you'll be yourself in the morning. I'll come and look after you when I turn out."

"Good night, my boy. You're a dear, good fellow, Val. God bless you!"

Val walked away to his room, thinking his cousin was in a funny mood. He had before experienced what these fits were, but he had never known Arundel affectionate to him, or heard him acknowledge that he loved anyone. Val could not make it out. He puzzled over it, and came to the conclusion that Arundel was not half such a bad fellow as he made himself out to be. It did not occur to him that his own gentleness had perhaps awoke a sense of goodness in the hard man. When he shut the door on his cousin, Arundel said to himself——

"Now it's too late, I'm beginning to find out that there's something worth more than gold in the world. That boy is happy, because he has real goodness in him. He'd be happy wherever he was, even if he had to work for his living. I've always tried to buy my happiness, and I have bought it too—sometimes; but I can't buy her love. Fool that I am! Why don't I crush the love out of me? Stamp it out!" and he tried to stamp the floor, but his legs seemed feeble. "I have money to gratify every want, and yet I must endure this misery. Why won't money give me power to crush it out?" He looked again at the name on the handkerchief. "No," he thought, "I don't want to crush it out!" He kissed the name on the handkerchief. "What a fool!" he began again fiercely. "Fancy Arundel Lifton, who has been worshipped by a dozen women, making such a fool of himself. Why, I could make almost any woman love me, and some of the poor brutes loved me all the better for my cruelty to them. Women are like dogs, you must keep them under your thumb, and they love you all the better for it. It was capital sport. Happiness! I've bought plenty of happiness in my time." And he gave one of his fiendish laughs. "Why don't I do it now? Why do I sit here craving for the love of one woman,

when I can have the love of a dozen? Bah! what do I care for the little dog-like brutes, who follow you faithfully, and lick your hand when you kick them? or for the painted butterflies who only want money spent on them. It is the one woman I want—the grand, noble woman, fit to be the companion of a man. But I'm not a man, I'm a fiend! I'll crush the devil out of me. I'll be a man. Leonora, Leonora, for your sake I'll commence a new life. I'll——"

He tried to shape out some different course of life, but he felt an inability to think coming over him. He found he could not breathe easily, and a stifling sensation came into his throat. He made an effort to think what it was he wanted to do, but could not. He had an instinct to get up and go to his dressing-case for brandy, for he was accustomed to a feeling of faintness occasionally, especially during his fits; but he found he could not move. His hands were locked in one another, holding the handkerchief. He put his head back in the large low chair, and remained perfectly motionless. Anyone seeing Arundel Lifton's face at that time would have said that the expression was changed. Many of the lines and marks were still there, for fifty years of villainy cannot be stamped out of a face in a few moments; but there was some difference easily perceptible—something that made him look a better man.

Arundel Lifton lies perfectly still there in the dead of night, and above him lies the woman he has so madly loved—his wife.

What makes Leonora wake up in the night with a strange shivering feeling, and a presentiment of something wrong? She fancies she heard an odd sound. She listens, but all is silent—so very silent, it seems to her.

CHAPTER LXII.

FORGIVENESS.

Owning her weakness,
  Her evil behaviour,
And leaving, with meekness,
  Her sins to her Saviour.—HOOD.

ON the evening of Mr. Temple's arrival he had, after seeing Leonora and Kate comfortably settled in their room, driven to the Home to see how Flora was. She was always brighter in the evening, so he was able to see her.

The interview could only be a distressing one—regrets on the one side, and forgiveness on the other. Mr. Temple explained to her what had happened to prevent Leonora and Kate from coming that evening, but he hoped they would be well enough to come the next day. Flora was overcome with grief when she heard this, for she then realized what a sad life Leonora's must have been. She begged that Leonora would not come unless she were quite able, as she felt assured of her forgiveness now.

Mr. Temple stayed a very short time with her, and left her comparatively happy, as she knew that her child and Leonora were so near. In the early morning Mr. Temple went to Leonora's room, and knocked cautiously, lest she should be asleep, but she had been awake a long time, with a strange uneasy sensation.

"You had better not come yet, Leonora," said Mr. Temple. "Let me go first and come back and fetch you. Remain in bed till then."

"Where are you going, papa?" said Kate, "am I to go too?"

Kate had been thinking that all sorts of mysterious things were happening, and she was now not surprised at anything, only she wondered whether it all had anything to do with Jack. Lord Arun puzzled her particularly; he tried to be so attentive to her, and she could not help laughing at him.

"No, Kate," said her father "you're not coming with me now; take care of mamma. I'm going to see a poor sick person, and when I come back I'll take you and mamma too, if mamma is better."

"Is the ugly man here still, papa?"

"He isn't up yet, nor anybody else. You had better not leave this room till I come back, and then there'll be no fear of meeting him. I shall not be long."

William Temple drove away in the early morning, with a multitude of thoughts running through his mind. The one great trouble which had taken from him his position in the world, which had damped all his hopes and ambitions, was soon to be removed, but it seemed of little use to him now. He did not care again to make a name in the world; besides, there was his sister, he thought, she must be protected, she had yet her trouble to bear. Then he almost wished that it might be Arundel Lifton that was to be taken instead of poor Flora. Then he thought of his little Kate, and how she had lost all her bright gaiety and was learning only too soon what trouble was.

"How I wish I could save her this interview," he thought; "it can do little good, and will do her incalculable harm. She looks ill enough already. What can have happened to that young Sebright? He's evidently heard about her mother, and is too proud to join himself to such a family."

Many more thoughts occupied William Temple as he drove, on that cold, grey December morning, to the Home.

When he arrived he was asked into a cold, cheerless room, in which the fire had only that minute been lighted, and a dull dirty smoke was struggling up through the wood and coal. He had to wait some time, for the mother had been up all night, and had gone to freshen herself a little before seeing him.

"I have no good account for you," she said, as she came in.

"I am prepared for whatever you may have to tell me," said Temple.

"She died a few hours ago, quite quietly," said the mother.

There was silence in the room for a minute, except for the crackling sound of the wood burning.

"Will you see her?" said the mother.

"No, no," said Temple, with just a gesture of disgust. "What is the mere covering when the spirit is gone?"

The mother thought him rather hard-hearted. Many people like looking at a corpse, and women, in a house of death, will often consider it as an insult to the dead if a visitor will not go and see the body.

To see the dead body of a stranger is not pleasant, or of a friend or acquaintance, but the body of one that you have loved is the most terrible sight of all. You have known every turn and line in the face, have looked into the eyes, and kissed the lips, have seen it lighted up with fun and laughter, or saddened with trouble and tears; have pressed it to your own, and felt in the very touch of it the love that there is between you.

That face may still look ever so beautiful after death, but you realise that it was not that bit of flesh that you loved, but something else, of which that flesh was only the covering. It is surely better not to look at the dead face of one we have loved.

Disregard of the mere covering of the spirit could not have been better shown than by that phrase of Shakespeare's—

"—Shuffle off this mortal coil."

The word "shuffle" carries such contempt with it. You shuffle out of the covering as you would out of an old garment —something done with and cast aside.

If Mr. Temple had ever loved Flora, he had long since lost

that love; but he objected, in any case, to looking at a dead body. So the mother put him down as hard-hearted, and if she had known the first thought that entered his mind after her announcement, she would have thought even worse of him; for when he heard that poor Flora was dead, he thanked God that Kate need not have the meeting that he dreaded so much. He was full of pity for Flora, but Kate was his one thought and care.

Death seems to cause an oppressive stillness in the house. All the sounds seem different. The clocks seem to tick with an unusual sound, and footsteps and voices seem different. Mr. Temple felt depressed. It was a cold, wretched morning, and he had come out without breakfast; so he thought it best to go back to the inn at once, and he assured the mother that he would either see her or send to her in the course of the day.

CHAPTER LXIII.

GRAVE AND GAY.

ASTROLOGOS: You look at life, Prince, through rose-tinted spectacles.
RAFAEL: And you through drab ones.
ASTROLOGOS: Not at all, your Excellence—
I have three sets, with a miraculous difference,
These show the Past, with all its wondrous mysteries;
Rimmed are they with the horn of the rhinoceros:
These show the Future—rim of gold encircles them:
But these, with setting of a very sombre sort,
Mere dusky ebony, my Prince, mere ebony,
Show the strong Present, wheresoever turned they are.
RAFAEL: So. May I see my true love?
ASTROLOGOS: Take the spectacles.
RAFAEL: O! *The Comedy of Dreams.*

THE day of Flora's death was the day on which Jack and his father had the interview with Mr. Voyd, and on the afternoon of that day Mr. Forncett and Harry Rivers and Jack left Two Bridges station for town. Jack very reluctantly went with Harry Rivers to Mr. Forncett's hotel, Harry chaffing him very much about being so serious, and saying he only wished he had as much chance of Miss Temple.

When Forncett arrived in Old Burlington Street, he found that the Temples had left the day before, and it was not known when they would return. Mr. Temple had left an order that no letters were to be forwarded until they heard from him.

Therefore Mr. Forncett arrived at his hotel soon after Jack and Harry, and Jack looked the picture of despair when he heard the news.

"It's like my luck," he said, "everything has gone wrong with me lately. She can't even have had my letter. And there's no knowing how ill she may be. I fear she has had to be removed because of her illness. What can I do?"

"Nothing but wait patiently, you impetuous boy," said Frank. "I'll go up again to-night, to hear if there is any news of them, they will either come back or write, for Mr. Temple would never leave his letters untouched. His correspondence is of importance. So now eat your dinner, for you know you can't live on love."

But it was not love that was spoiling Jack's appetite, it was anxiety. He could do nothing but reproach himself about Kate's illness; he felt sure it was all his fault. He worried himself about it, and he worried Frank and Harry too, and though they both laughed at him, he would not be consoled. Frank knew that if she were seriously ill he should have heard of it, for the bond of friendship—or what they persuaded themselves was friendship—between him and Leonora was such that they recorded to one another all the small incidents of their lives.

When two people love another, whether they be lovers or friends, or both, for the true lover is a true friend, it is astonishing what a lot of pretty little nonsense they will write. The most trivial affairs are interesting to them. They may both pass in the world as serious, clever, and strong-minded people, yet to one another they are mere children, amusing each other with trifles. And how charming it is when the "friend who is as your own soul" has high intellect, and does good work in the world, and is strong in mind and purpose, and yet shows a weak side of character to you only. You feel that you treasure it up as a secret, and love the very weakness.

At least this was how Leonora felt about Frank Forncett. He passed in the world as a clever, grave, philosophic man: yet this grave philosopher could write the prettiest nonsense to Leonora—not love-nonsense—because they were only to be friends. And if *he* was not allowed to send a kiss to Leonora, his bull-dog Foxy might; not that Foxy gave one at all the impression of wanting to send a kiss to a lady; he did not look it a bit; he was a stolid, surly little fellow, with a very determined affection for his master and Ralph, and nobody else. If he had any tender regard for a woman at all,

it was for Mary, who would give him a choice little bit of food occasionally, for Foxy was not a vulgar dog who would eat anything.

But Foxy was made very useful in sending his love to Leonora.

Now, Frank Forncett passing in the world as a grave philosopher, not without a spice of humour though, did not care to acknowledge to Jack that his intimacy with Leonora was such that he was sure to have heard if anything serious had happened. So he could not altogether allay Jack's fears, and Jack was very fidgetty.

After dinner Mr. Forncett went round again to Old Burlington Street, and found that a telegram had arrived, ordering the maid to be sent on that night to the Bedford, at Brighton, with the letters and changes of linen for a couple of days.

Jack, when he heard this, wanted to rush off to Brighton at once; but Frank urged him to be patient till the next morning, when he would telegraph. He thought something unusual might have occurred, and that there would probably be a letter for him at Copse Hill the next morning, as they hardly expected him in town so early in the week, and his letter announcing his intention to come on Tuesday had not, of course, reached them, in consequence of the awkward postal arrangements on Sundays at Copse Hill.

Jack wished he might have his own way and rush down to Brighton that night, though, as he reflected, he would arrive too late to be able to call, and after all he could hardly dare to call till Mr. Forncett had seen them. So he tried to get through another night as well as he could, Frank reminding him that if he neither ate nor slept he would lose his beauty, and be a miserable object to present to his lady-love.

But all Frank's fun could not relieve Jack's anxiety. He got only snatches of sleep all night, and kept dreaming he was pursuing Kate in wild places, and that just as he put out his hand to catch her, she slipped away from him and became invisible. And she seemed to have a wild unearthly look about her, with a very white face, and this white face kept haunting Jack after he woke, so that he felt certain she was very ill.

Jack was up early, and had been wandering about in the streets when his companions came down to breakfast. He wanted to know whether Frank had sent out the telegram.

"Good gracious, boy," said Frank, "why, they won't be up yet. People don't get up early these dark December mornings, unless they're very much in love, like some one I know. We'll have some breakfast first, and then we'll telegraph."

About an hour after breakfast, when Jack's anxiety and impatience were at their height, a telegram came in answer to Frank's telling him that Mr. Temple would be thankful if he would come down to them at once if convenient, and he would be pleased to see Mr. Sebright.

"There, Jack," said Frank. "That's more than I expected. Are you happy now? That's as good as 'yes' from Mr. Temple. You may consider your troubles at an end."

"You lucky boy!" said the envious Harry, who thought he had never seen a woman so lovely as Kate.

Jack's face so completely altered after this news that, notwithstanding his anxiety and loss of sleep and appetite, he looked as handsome as ever.

He was full of spirits as they travelled, only the train would not go fast enough for him, and Frank envied him in his happiness. If Frank had only read a letter that was lying at his house that morning, how his thoughts would have changed! He felt almost sad as he saw the boy's happiness, and thought how such joy had always been denied to him, and was likely to be. The more joyous Jack became the sadder Frank felt.

When they reached Brighton, Jack, of course, wanted to get out of the train long before it had stopped, and had to be held down by Frank.

When they reached the hotel they were shown into a room by themselves, and presently the waiter returned to say would Mr. Forncett come alone to speak to Mr. Temple.

Jack's face fell a little at this. He wondered whether all was quite right. But he had faith in what Forncett could do for him. He waited a long time—ages, it seemed to him; but he took out his watch every two minutes, and the time seemed to go so slowly.

"I suppose he's telling him all about it," thought Jack.

But Mr. Forncett was not doing so by any means. He had something else to think of by this time, and had for the moment positively forgotten poor Jack.

Jack waited yet. Why were they so long? He took up a newspaper, and mechanically read something; then he took up another, and mechanically read something else, and jumbled the two things together in his mind. Then he walked round the room, looking at the prints on the wall. There was one of the *Black Brunswicker*.

"Confound it all!" he thought, wishing he had Kate in the same position as the lady was in the picture. It seemed so tantalizing to be so near her, and yet not be able to see her.

"There is surely some difficulty, or he could not be so long," thought Jack.

At last the door opened, and Jack looked eagerly to see who came. It was Mr. Temple. His face was so grave that Jack's hopes immediately went down to zero.

"How do you do, Mr. Sebright?" he said solemnly.

"Quite well, thank you," faltered Jack, looking very pale.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Temple, "to be unable to entertain you,"—Jack thought the very worst had come, and his heart seemed almost to stop beating—"but I must go away to-day on some urgent affairs, and hope to be with you to-morrow." Jack's face brightened a little. "In the meantime," continued Mr. Temple, "will you and Mr. Forncett remain here as my guests?—and I am sure I can leave the ladies in your care. Mr. Forncett will acquaint you with the cause of my sudden departure. I have no time to make any further explanation. I must apologise for keeping you waiting so long."

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Jack. "'Twas nothing."

Jack did not think it was nothing a few minutes ago. His face had so wonderfully changed during the last few moments that Mr. Temple must have noticed it.

It all seemed very strange to Jack. He could not make it out. All he knew was that he was left in charge of Kate. Delicious idea! He did not know quite how he got out of that room and into another, where he found Kate, and where also he found Leonora and Frank; only he was quite unconscious of their presence for some moments, having eyes for nothing but the one object which was all the world to him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AT COPSE HILL AGAIN.

Void is the man of what befits a gentleman,
Void of the English easy, humorous courtesy,
Void of the pure contempt for dull rascality,
Void utterly of Christ's unmeasured kindliness,
Void of high feeling, and a trifle viperous.
The Comedy of Dreams.

A WEEK after the date mentioned in the last chapter, our friends are all at Copse Hill again; they are all congregated at Manly Frowde's, for he seems to them to be a sort of centre amongst them, a sun round which they, as planets, travel.

He can enter into their joy and sympathise with their grief, and teach them a philosophy which will help them to bear trouble well and use pleasure wisely. There is something in the man which draws everyone to him—Mr. Voyd called it "fascination." Of course it is not a fascination, but it is difficult to find a proper word.

There were Kate and Jack intensely happy, and somehow they felt that they should like to tell Mr. Frowde how happy they were. They loved one another very much, and almost forgot everyone else in their happiness, but they both loved Mr. Frowde too. There were others who had joys—subdued joys, mixed with sorrows, and they wanted to tell Mr. Frowde all about it.

So Manly Frowde has plenty to hear.

Jack had so much to say, and Kate would keep interrupting him, and Manly Frowde was just like a big boy listening to them and laughing at all their adventures.

"And oh! you'll never forgive me," said Kate, giving Manly Frowde a kiss, "for sending those dear verses of yours to the wash. It looked as if I didn't care for them a bit, you know, and I did; and I know you'll never write me any more, because you think I don't value them."

"Won't I?" said Manly Frowde. "You shall have some on white satin on your wedding-day, and you shall have plenty more on every occasion, child. You need not trouble to keep them, they are of no value, and there are more where those came from."

Then Frank Forncett had so much to say.

"You know, Frowde, it seems wrong to be so happy when one's happiness is gained through another's death, especially as the poor fellow seems really to have loved her. He has left her everything, except a small part of his estate which he had not the power to will away from the family, and he was actually found dead holding a handkerchief marked with her name. They got her out of the house without telling her about it till she was away. Kate was not told about her mother for some days. Young Lord Arun behaved in the noblest way. He managed everything for Temple, and really showed such good sense, and poor Lifton seems to have spoken very kindly to him before he died. Temple did not wish him to trouble himself about Flora, because he thought Valentine's name might get mixed up unpleasantly with hers; but the boy did not seem to mind that, and would attend to everything. I really honour him. I had no idea he had such sense."

"Another ten years will, I daresay, make a fine fellow of him," said Frowde.

"Leonora and Mr. Temple were also at the Cottage, and Lord Arun, who was Frank Forncett's visitor. Lord Arun was going about from one to the other with his eye-glass and his disconnected sentences. He had taken to Mrs. Frowde.

"So glad to meet your husband," he said. "Awfully clever fellow, you know. Read his verses. They're so jolly, don't you see, don't bore a fellow. Used to keep one of his novels by my bedside, and have a look at it when I couldn't go to sleep."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Frowde, "you mean it sent you to sleep."

"No, don't mean that, you know, but he says such clever things, and teaches a fellow how to live, don't you see?—I mean, you know, he makes you try to be good."

Mrs. Frowde was delighted with this praise of her husband; she was ever ready to listen to anyone who loved or admired Manly Frowde. She decided that Lord Arun must be a good fellow notwithstanding his odd way of expressing himself.

Then Lord Arun chatted with the Miss Selfes, and Claudia quite "brought him out," as she expressed it.

Diana Selfe, of course, chaffed Jack and Kate very much, and pictured Jack as a bishop, and Kate as a bishopess.

Mrs. Frowde said that Jack must certainly be the Vicar of Copse Hill.

"And Mr. Frowde must write my sermons," said Jack, laughing.

"But Frowde already sermonizes to a much larger congregation than our little church will hold," said Frank Forncett.

"I shall be frightened to hold the living after such a distinguished predecessor," said Jack.

"At any rate, you will not distinguish yourself in the same way," said Mrs. Frowde.

"There seems no chance of the living at present," said Jack. "Mr. Voyd appears to be quite contented with his position."

Our friends all separated in the evening, and on the following day Diana and Claudia Selfe left the cottage. Manly Frowde and his wife and dogs stood at the gate to see them off, and as they drove up the road they continually turned round and saw Manly Frowde still watching them and waving his handkerchief. As they were just going out of sight, they stopped for a moment and gave one last look, and then went on sadly. Was it a presentiment of anything to come that made them stay for a moment and fix on their minds the picture of the big, gentle, affectionate man as he stood there with his wife and dogs by his side?

CHAPTER LXV.

THE LAST ACT.

He not only wrote poetry, but he made life a poem, and rejoiced if he was ever able to lead others to do the same. I should think no man ever worked harder in the profession of literature than he did, and yet he never seemed bored by it, or allowed others to share the weariness and anxiety which he must often have suffered. I cannot help dwelling upon this, because it was such a striking feature in his character, springing as it did from that deep religion in his soul, which made him feel that life was full of God, and therefore an unjoyous spirit was unworthy of true manliness.—*A Lady's Letter.*

"COMEDY meaneth sweet play in a village," was the first sentence of this story. The writer of that sentence of course took the literal meaning of Comedy. The play, so far as the characters in this book are concerned, is nearly played out.

I would that the curtain could drop on the scene in the last chapter, or that it could rise again on even a pleasanter one.

Nearly two years have passed, and I should like to show Jack Sebright as Vicar of Copse Hill, with his beautiful Kate as his companion in his work.

I should like to show the village freed from gossip, at least from malicious gossip, and good feeling existing as of old, when Mr. Bonfellow was vicar.

I should like to show Manly Frowde still walking about in his old velvet coat and straw hat, with his ever-inseparable companions—his wife and dog. I should like to show pleasant meetings at his cottage, where everyone seemed free and happy.

But I can show none of these things.

Kate and Jack are happy, living in a pleasant vicarage not very far from Ashton Minima—near enough to be within a day's drive.

Leonora and Frank travelled for some time after their marriage, and have now settled down in a country house which adjoins Lord Ravensbourne's estate. Lord Medway talks of his aunt with great pride.

Ralph has consoled himself with Mary, and they live in a lodge in the grounds. He still declines to acknowledge that women are necessary to a man's existence, but Mary manages him all the same.

Kate insists on calling her aunt mamma still, and as Leonora has just had a little boy, Kate declares she has got a brother.

William Temple often visits his daughter. He has given up Winterslow, and travels about from place to place.

Lord Arun has not yet found anyone whom he thinks as lovely as Kate, neither has he yet learnt to put a sentence together.

While Harry Branscombe was wondering which he liked best, Diana or Claudia Selfe, another friend of Manly Frowde's took Diana away. So the wonderful pony that has done so much "shooling" with his mistresses, and the peerless dog, their constant companion, have now found a master. But Claudia declares that she will not give up her claim to a half share in the beloved pony and dog; so, if she marries, the question will become complicated.

These people are all happy, but in their happiness there is one shadow. There is one thing they all miss in their lives; something that makes them wish not to visit Copse Hill again. The little village may still look as beautiful to a stranger as it did to Frank Forncett and Harry Rivers on that October morning when they saw it from the top of the hill. The furze and heather still bloom there. The burly landlord still waddles about, or falls asleep on the bench outside his inn. The sign of the Pleiades still hangs out in the road, inviting thirsty travellers to stop and take what Lord Ravensbourne's servants described as "beastly stuff."

There is Miss Tattleton, too, as buxom as ever, though her face is beginning to wear a less pleasing expression than it did. She is in a particularly bad temper just now, for she has been unsuccessful in "making a deal" with a cattle-dealer for her pigs, and she wanted the money for what she calls a "fiend" that is to call on her. She and the cattle-dealer have been standing by the pig-stye for some quarter of an hour in a cold wind, and she has come in with a face-ache, and without having sold her pigs; so the next customer who goes in is rather to be pitied.

Old John still meanders across for his glass of beer. The Vicar passes by with his saintly smile. "Old Uriah," as Miss Tattleton calls him, still occasionally "changes Sundays."

On rare occasions Mr. Bonfellow comes over to take the service, and everybody's face brightens at the sight of him. But what Harry Rivers called the "poetic spirit" of the place has gone. The strong, gentle Manly Frowde, whom everybody loved, is dead. He worked unceasingly and uncomplainingly, but his work was too great a strain upon him, and his heart ruptured. Afterwards, when his friends found how he had worked, they wished that they had known of it that